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Through the Valley of Gods

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Through the Valley of Gods

Travels in the Central Himalayas

S. V 6/4/09

Man Mohan Sharma

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26/4/07

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For

Anjali, Geeta, Anuradha

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Preface

THE CENTRAL Himalayas comprise the region which was called Uttarakhand in the olden days and includes Kumaon and Garhwal hills. This whole area is replete with marvellous beauty of nature. Nowhere are God's attributes and divine manifestations mirrored with greater perfection than here. The holiest of the holy shrines—Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarth, Badrinath and the Gurdwara Shri Hemkunt Sahib —are all located in Uttarakhand. The area finds a mention in the earliest Sanskrit literature. For centuries, it has attracted throngs of people of all shades of faith. Indeed, in the history and evolution of the Hindu religion, no place is as important as is Uttarakhand.

During 1970-73, I had the good fortune of being officially posted in Uttarakhand where travelling over the length and breadth of the countryside was my job. I got unique opportunities of travelling extensively on foot and ponies and by road and helicopter. The beauty of the magnificent mountains abounding with flora and fauna, and above all the sterling qualities of the people simply captivated me. I listened carefully to the myths and legends narrated by men who fell in step with me in these remote regions. I read with rising interest books on Uttarakhand, some of which gave briliiant accounts of explorations, expeditions, travels and studies of different aspects of the life and pastimes of the people. The first-hand study, however, revealed a missing link. No existing book provided a complete coverage of the large store of mythological legends which have been fondly passed for untold centuries by one generation to the next in Uttarakhand. Hence this book.

One thing emphatically struck me that the area has been variously referred to as the *Deva Bhoomi* (or the valley of gods) *Devatma*, *Punya Bhoomi*, and so on. The beauty and richness of this region have justifiably made it the dwelling place of most of our gods: Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Shakti and Ganesh—the *Panch Parmeshwar*. Also the nature has given it the pride of place of being the source point of two of our holiest

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rivers, Ganga and Yamuna. *Deva Bhoomi*, thus, is the fittest description of this region and accordingly, I call my book *Through the Valley of Gods.*

The object of this book is to provide a comprehensive guide to the traveller and relate the fascinating myths and legends as they are current among the hill people of this valley. During the *jal pralaya* where was it that Vishnu towed the boat carrying Sapta Rishi? Where did Shiva get married to Parvati? Where did Ganga descend on earth? Where was Lakshman brought after he fell unconscious in the battle with Ravana? Where was *sanjivani buti* found? Where did Kunti marry the Pandu king and where was it that she begot Karna, her son by Surya? In which *ashram* did Shakuntala, the immortal heroine of Kalidasa's play, live? Where did Rishi Vyas write the *Mahabharata*? Where did Guru Gobind Singh meditate in his earlier life? All these and scores of other tales from our rich store of mythology have been narrated here.

One thing may be clarified at the outset. Where people's faith is concerned, it is not necessary to offer scientific explanations. Faith and folly are as closely related as fact and fancy. In faith, many questions remain unanswered though not always unanswerable. It is pertinent to note that no religion in the world is without these scientifically inexplicable fables. Garuda, the wonder-working bird mount of Vishnu, for example, is common to the legends and fables of many people: the *rukh* of the *Arabian Nights*, the *kimi* of Japan, and the *sehmurgh* of Persia, etc. I have no doubt that bereft of their embellishments, the basic ideas of myths and legends always contain the memories of events of remote past.

There are also other aspects that may interest the more scientifically inclined readers and those interested in beauty of the nature: How were the Himalayas born out of the Sea of Tethys? Where do we find the sea-life fossils and what link have they with mythology? What are the highways and byways? Where is the valley of flowers and how do we reach it? I have tried to give detailed information on all such geological and geographical points as well, and thus make the book useful to the tourist and scholar alike. Some historical details that might assist the traveller in seeing the things in their correct perspective have also been added.

If this work assists any of the travellers through the valley of gods in a greater and fuller satiation of the wander lust or any scholar to see even the smallest event connected with the valley in its correct historical perspective, the writer would feel amply rewarded.

New Delhi
8 November 1976

Man Mohan

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In the end, I am very happy at the association of Shri Krishna Kumar, Managing Editor, Vision Books, with this work of mine.

M.M.S.

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Contents

THE VALLEY OF GODS

1. Birth of the Himalayas 3
2. Physical Features of Uttarakhand 13
3. A Brief History of Uttarakhand 21
4. The People of Uttarakhand 28
5. Dancing Girls of Uttarakhand 37
6. Rajis of Uttarakhand 43
7. Folk Industries of Uttarakhand 50
8. Folk Arts of Uttarakhand 56

THE APPROACHES TO THE VALLEY

9. Pravesh—1
Dehra Dun—Mussoori—Kalsi—Chakrata 71
10. Pravesh—2
Hardwar—Rishikesh 80
11. Pravesh—3
Kotdwar—Lansdowne—Srinagar 85
12. Pravesh—4
Moradabad—Kashipur—Lansdowne 89
13. Pravesh—5
Bareilly—Kathgodam—Nainital—Mukteshwar—Almora—Ranikhet 91
14. Pravesh—6 102
Bareilly—Pilibhit—Phithoragarh

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CONTENTS

THE HIGHWAYS OF THE VALLEY

15. Yamunotri 109
16. Visit to Gangotri 118
17. Kedarnath 139
18. Badrinath Yatra 154
19. The Sikh Shrines 175
20. Rock Gardens of Uttarakhand 187

THE BYWAYS OF THE VALLEY

21. Jadh Ganga 197
22. Himal Parikrama 200
23. Bed of the Dead Sea of Tethys 210
Niti—Barahoti—Lapthal
24. Katyur 214
The Valley of Two Rivers
25. The Pindari Glacier 220
26. Rupkund 224
The Lake of Mystery
27. Johar—Gorichhal 228
The Valley of Gori Ganga
28. Darma 233
The Valley of Free Love
29. Vyas 235
The Valley of River Mahakali
30. The Wild Life of Uttarakhand 239

APPENDICES

Glossary 257
Bibliography 264
Index 277

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Colour Plates

River Bhagirath near Harsil	50-51
Kedarnath	50-51
The Valley of Flowers	50-51
Khasia girl with her Bhotia friend	50-51
A Bhotia family on the move	50-51
Shabyamuni's temple at Vagori	50-51
A Serow Sid in the Zaskar ranges	50-51
Keshva Prayag near Badrinath	50-51
A Gaddi grazier	50-51

Illustrations

Mount Drona Giri—Hanuman got the *Sanjivani Buti* from here

Hurakiyas of Gorichhal—A scence from Malu Sahi and Rajula

A river disappears—Saraswati gorge near Mana Badrinath

Ranth—Competitive spinning. All the scandals are hatched here as a by product.

En route to Lake Karnakul-Kagbhusandi

Natures's sparkle show

Soldiers' temple of Shiva in the arid trans-Himalayan region

The Kalpa Vriksha, the tree planted by Shri Shankaracharya at Joshimath

A Bhotia lady of Darma

Mount Api, the sleeping beauty

Gangotri

Hurakiyas of Bhilangana Valley—Here Shiva roams as a Bhil

Shri Shankaracharya's *gaddi* at Joshi Math

Children of the snows—Bhotia ladies of Vyas

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A beautiful view of Panch Chuli from Chankori
Vyas Pustaka, the *Geeta*
A soldier at Lipulekh Pass—The Enemy shall not pass
The trunk of the deodar tree that lived for more than 700 years
Jahnavi and Bhagirathi meet in one of the deepest gorges in the world Jalandhary Gad
Mount Nilkantha, the queen of Garhwal Himalayas
A remnant from the Sea of Tethys, an ammonite fossil found at high altitudes of the Himalayan ranges
A Bhotia lady with her load of grass for cattle
Hurakiyas of Gorichhal
Yamuna, the Surya Kanya
Bholi (author's wife) with a Bhotia lady of village Mana
A carpet-maker of Johar
Snows of Harsil
Vyas *gupha*—Here the epic, *Mahabharata*, is said to have been composed
A Bhotia couple of Gorichhal
A deserted village in Johar
Hemkund Parvat
Chholia, a mock fight for forcible carriage of the bride
A Bhotia lady with her child on her back
Panch Chuli mounts—the five friends
Tawaghat—the foaming confluence of Mahakali and Dharam Ganga

Charts

1. Yamunotri-Gangotri-Jadhaganga 114-115
2. Kedarnath 138-139
3. Badrinath—Valley of Flowers—Hemkund—Niti 154-155
4. Rupkund—the Lake of Mystery 224-225

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The Valley of Gods

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1

Birth of the Himalayas

THE DEMON, Hiranyaksha came to *prithvi* to trouble her. Brahma, the creator, was asleep when Hiranyaksha stole the *Vedas*. He then dragged *prithvi* under the ocean. So great was his brutal strength that even the gods trembled in their *sinhasanas*. So they went to Lord. Brahma and told him of the impending disaster. Brahma requested Vishnu, the preserver, to do something. Vishnu incarnated as a boar and went to the marshes to face Hiranyaksha. He charged at the demon and killed him. Thus *prithvi* was saved.

Jalandhar, the demon, was the son of the ocean. His flaming mouth could be seen at Jwalamukhi in Himachal with his body stretching through Punjab. In the fight between *devas* and *danavas*, he came face to face with Shiva, the Lord of mountains, who put a huge mountain on his head and crushed him to death.

Vayu, the Lord of winds and storms was roaming the *srishti*, riding his fleet-footed stag. Mount Meru came in his way. Vayu pitted his might against the mountain and hurled its peak into the ocean where it formed the Lanka *dweep*. The god of the winds resumed his journey and none ever came in his way again.

Rishi Rudraksha had his hermitage on the shore of the ocean. A pair of *tatiri* birds lived near the *ashram* and sang melodious songs for the sage. The female laid eggs. The hungry ocean ate them up. *Tatiri* then laid the eggs further ashore but the ocean searched them out and devoured them again. The bird cried in anguish and complained to the *rishi* who drank up the entire ocean. Even now, the birds sing at low tide and cry with shrill voices to call the *muni* at high tide.

Lakshman fell unconscious during the war with Ravana. To save him Hanuman flew off to the Himalayas to get *sanjivani booti*. Since he could not recognise the herb, he brought back the whole hill from Drona Giri. During his long flight back, he got tired and wanted to rest. As he was over vast oceans he appealed to them for a resting place. At this the

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Menaka Parvat slowly rose from the bed of the oceans. Hanumanji relaxed on it for a while and then resumed his flight.

Vishnu was asleep at the bed of the ocean and the Earth was emerging from his navel. Many creatures were roaming the Earth. Indra, the god of clouds and thunder had to be constantly on the move while waging war on demons of famine and drought. Indra approached Vishnu for a chariot. The ocean was churned and Airavata, the white elephant with four tusks, appeared as a ride for Indra.

The gods were looking for *amrita*, the elixir of life. They decided to churn Vishnu's ocean of milk. Mandara Parvat was used as a churn and the Vasuki Nag as a rope. Many objects started coming up from the depths of the ocean. Chandrama, the god of Moon was one of these. He married twenty-seven women but was very fond of the fourth wife. For this favouritism, he was cursed and from then onwards, goes through periods of waxing and waning. When he rises, the ocean still tries to reach him!

While churning the ocean, Vasuki Nag emitted a deadly poison which was capable of destroying the whole Earth by mere contact. Shiva saw this and quickly put the poison in his mouth. So deadly was the poison that Shiva's throat turned blue. From that day, Mahadev came to be called Neelkantha (the blue-throated).

And *ad infinitum!*

Hindu mythology is full of references to the emergence of mountains from the oceans and disappearance of oceans. Question arises, are these mere myths or do they provide clues to gigantic changes in the physical structure of the Earth in the distant past?

More and more eminent scientists are getting round to the view that myths merely represent truths of the past. The late Indologist Shri Ananda Coomarswamy was of the opinion that a myth was the path that would take man nearest to the truth. The *Ramayana*, for example, describes the 'Fiery Chariot' in minute details; that it was brilliant as the sun, as loud as thunder, swishing past like a comet and shining like two suns in the night sky. The 'Drona Parva' of *Mahabharata* describes a *viman* as having a spherical shape and moving with the help of power generated by mercury. *Smarangan-Sutradhara*, another Sanskrit work gives details of how aircraft were constructed. The *Vedas* speak of *vimans* of various types and names. Even a hundred years back, these descriptions could be dismissed as idle imagination. But can we do so today? The *Mahabharata* talks of the use of a new weapon, an iron-thunderbolt which left the corpses featureless; their hair and nails fell off; vessels broke into fragments without any cause; birds turned white and perished; all food became contaminated; incandescent smoke like that from ten thousand suns rose in the air! Doesn't that fit the description of an atomic weapon? In the numerous occurrences of '*Akashvani*' in Hindu mythology, a clear resemblance to radio messages can be easily discerned. Dr. Raja Ramanna,

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Director of our Atomic Research Centre is of the view that much scientific knowledge lies in our ancient Sanskrit works. He has discovered a resemblance in the *tandava nritya* of Shiva with the modern particle physics; in the annihilation and recreation of matter and energy. We all know that Kanada and not Dalton was the first to propound atomic theory.

Talking of yet another myth which has proved a truth; the worldwide legend of the terrible deluge of *jal pralya* is already known to have been an actual occurrence. Noah's Arc has a parallel in Hindu mythology in the *matsya* incarnation of Vishnu in which the lord of preservation assumed the form of a fish and towed the boat carrying Sapta Rishi to the safety of the Himalayas. Similar tales about the deluge occur in all ancient lands like Greece, Sumeria, Mexico and Guatemala. Plato talked of the disappearance of Atlantis under the waters. Recently, scientists have almost solved the mystery. It is believed that the deluge was caused by the crashing down of one of the moons on the Earth. The Moon does not revolve around the Earth in a circle or ellipse but in an ever diminishing spiral. Thus in the distant future, millions of years hence, it would reach a stage where the gravitational pull would make it crash on Earth. A similar moon crashed in the Atlantic about 11,000 years back. The ocean started boiling; vast quantities turned into steam and covered the entire Earth with thick clouds. The rays of the Sun got shut out and many creatures froze to death. This was followed by cloudbursts and a terrible deluge. Then Vishnu descended on Earth as a *matsya* and saved the species from total extinction. It has been conjectured that three similar moons have already crashed onto the Earth. Does it denote a cyclic representation of the Hindu idea of *yugas*?

Going back to our fables of the appearance and disappearance of oceans and mountains, it is noteworthy that there is a beautiful peak named Neelkantha in Uttarakhand near Badrinath. There is also a turbulent stream, Jalandhari Gad, which is believed to symbolise the bleeding mouth of Jalandhara, the son of the ocean.

The question naturally arises as to who was the demon Jalandhara, and who is Shiva? How did Menaka Parvat rise out of the sea? Who was Hiranyaksha who dragged *prithvi* under the ocean? Who was Vishnu who slept at the bottom of the ocean? What does churning of ocean denote? All this is within the misty region of mythological legends and it is not always possible to get a precise answer. Nor is it necessary. All this, however, does give a clue to the fact that ancient Aryans probably knew about the appearance and disappearance of land and oceans. They were probably aware of the birth of mountains out of the collision of continents and the symbolic churning of the seas.

By now, we take it for granted that the Himalayas emerged out of the sea. The uplift can be easily detected, that is, in case we know how to read the language of nature.

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Geologists are of the opinion that the Himalayas are some of the youngest mountains in the world. They were pushed up by a slow yet violent crumbling of the Earth's crust, raising the great Central Asian Plateau in the Tertiary age. Consequently, the uplifted land folded over against the solidly resisting Siberian mass to the north, and Indian peninsula to the south. These folds were caused by millions of years of slow movements which made the land masses emerge from the seas and raised as mountains. The emergence itself dates back to about sixty to hundred million years.

The sea from which the Himalayas emerged has been named the 'Sea of Tethys. The once world-girdling proud sea disappeared in deep trenches formed by titanic forces of nature. The flora and fauna of this ancient sea got embedded in the folds and petrified in the course of time. A conclusive evidence of the upward movement of the Himalayas is, therefore, provided by huge marine fossil beds found in various parts of the mountain ranges.

But can a whole sea just disappear in a trench? For an answer, we have to examine the vital statistics of the Earth. We are told that the volume of the Earth is 260,000,000,000 cubic miles. The land surface and the water are not uniformly distributed. The water covers a surface of 71 per cent and stretches to 139,440,000 square miles. Whereas in the northern hemisphere, areas of water and land are almost equal, in the southern hemisphere, the area covered by land is one-fifteenth of that covered by water. But is that the true representation of water in the structure of Earth? No. The average height of the land above sea level is 2,750 feet. The average depth of the ocean is 12,300 feet. The deepest part of the ocean, at the Mariana Trench, south-west of Guam Island is 36,198 feet. Mount Everest is 29,028 feet. Tremendous and gigantic as this depth and height look, they are insignificant irregularities and in fact mere wrinkles on the surface of the Earth. In case the Earth is assumed to be a globe of 16 inches diameter, both Mount Everest and Mariana Trench would appear minor irregularities like those on the rind of an orange. The mass of solid matter in Earth is about 900 times that of water. If the Earth is assumed to be a football, the water would be just sufficient to wet its surface! The entire surface-water can, therefore, disappear in relatively shallow trenches which would look like mere scratches on its surface.

Is Rishi Rudraksha a reference to one such trench?

Many geologists are of the view that huge quantities of water under the great Indian Thar desert represent the entrapped remnants of the Sea of Tethys. There is also one more dead sea lying entrapped under the Sahara desert at a depth of 1,000 to 4,000 feet with an area of 230,000 square miles. This is called the 'Sea of Albienne'. How many more of these lie undiscovered even now? Who knows?

Returning to the proof rendered by the fossils; the definition of a fossil

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is 'something that has been turned into stone'. Fossils of animals are normally caused by violent deaths or when dead bodies are covered by earth immediately after death. This sudden engulfment is almost a precondition. As a rule, life feeds on life. In case a dead body is exposed, the predators and carrion eaters will have a meal and the remains would slowly turn to the elements. The dead should, therefore, either be preserved, or the number of dead should be such that some get fossilized in spite of the predators. Sometimes climatic changes, shortage of food supply and volcanic activity can cause a large number of deaths. However, it is none of these changes that seem to have resulted in fossilization of marine life in the Himalayas. It is the upheaval and resultant crumbling of huge rocks and debris engulfing vast colonies of marine life.

Fossilization may also have been caused by sedimentation in the oceans. Mineral matters close in on objects and preserve their shapes. Such casts of the tree leaves are found between Kargil and Leh in Ladakh. It may be stressed here that only a very small fraction of fossils can be unearthed by men or nature. Such inherent difficulties in fossilization or their discovery make fossil collection and collaboration of threads of information a fascinating subject.

Gigantic fossilized graveyards are scattered all over the Himalayas including Uttarakhand. We shall see many of them during our travels. The ages of the fossils, however, range to remote past—much older than sixty or a hundred million years. It is, therefore, possible that quite a large proportion of the fossils were caused by sedimentation or by physical changes at the very beginning for the upheaval. It is also possible that the emergence of the Himalayas is much older than mere hundred million years! A concentration of fossils in some areas also indicates the fact that as the uplift started, huge lakes got trapped within the rising mountains with the resulting congregation of life in these temporarily sheltered areas.

The Sea to Tethys must have stretched for hundreds of miles and displayed all its turbulent moods for not only have the Himalayas emerged out of this sea but also a vast proportion of the north Indian plains. From time to time a number of scholars have put forward the view that the Himalayas and a major part of Indo-Gangetic plains have emerged out of the sea. Albrun ;expressed this view in the eleventh century. In the book *Himalayan India, Its Climate and Diseases* (1880) F.N. Mac Namara wrote, 'In crossing into Cashmere, fossils are found in the carboniferous lime stone, sand stones and shales...It is probable that in Eocene times, a great sea covered the whole of the Indus plains and the western portion of the Gangetic plain as far east as Kumaon. The same sea covered the shore or the greater part of Persia and Beloochistan and sent an arm along what is now the upper Indus valley in Ladakh.'

The Bengali poet, Shri D.L. Roy wrote in 1912 in his famous poem 'Bharat Varsha':

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Jedin sunil jaldhe hoite uthila
Janani Bharat Varsha.
Uthila Vishwe seki kalorab seki ma
Bhakti seki ma harsha.

(Oh Mother India, the day you emerged out of the deep blue seas, what jubilation and what a sense of devotion prevailed in the world.)

Marine fossils have been discovered by a number of mountain expeditions ranging from Hindukush to Karakoram (Krishna Giri) and the Himalayas from Ladakh to eastern Nepal. Thus the land we tread on was once in the depths of an ocean and when the ocean was churned for *amrit*, many things emerged out of its bosom. More of the fossils in Uttarakhand will be noted hereafter.

The evidence of the uplift, however, is not provided only by the fossils. The other proof of the gigantic force of uplift is found on the banks of the rivers. When the rivers pass through the gorges, we see successive lines of flow indicated in horizontal marks much above the current beds. This does not mean that the water ever flowed at such heights. It only tells the story of the uplift. Most of the rivers originating in Tibet and from the current water-shed between India and Tibet were in existence prior to the birth of the Himalayas. They must have drained vast areas and merged in the Sea of Tethys. As the Himalayas started rising, these ancient rivers continued along their original courses and kept on digging deeper and deeper into gorges. Thus it is not that the waters necessarily were at the level of the markings but the markings have themselves been uplifted through the ages. This has also given rise to some of the deepest Himalayan gorges in the world. The line of the highest Himalayan peaks is not continuous but divided in groups by the rivers. It proves that as the uplift continued, the rivers which were in existence prior to the uplift resisted the change and went on digging deeper and deeper to maintain their original courses.

This uplift was against the law of gravity and therefore not a one-way traffic. As the rocks and sediments were slowly pushed up, the forces of disruption came into play. In places the land emerged out of ocean bed, in others the sea invaded the land and a vast interchange of land and sea took place. It must have been like a constant war between the *devas* and *danavas*. The forces of gravity demolished the emerging ranges and pushed the debris as low as possible. The glaciers then took over and ground the rocks under tons of ice and gurgled them out as sand at their snouts. From there, the rivers took charge and conveyed the ground matter to the plains. The process is unending. Sedimentation in the Indo-Gangetic plains is about eight kilometres deep in places. What must have been the magnitude of the original uplift!

Yet another proof of the Himalayas having risen out of the depth of seas is high conglomerate content in the rocks. Ancient rivers washed sand,

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clay and pebbles from the mountains of the past and took this material to the seas. At the bed of oceans, this material got cemented together by pressure of ages. This matter is called conglomerate and is encountered all over the Himalayas. In Uttarakhand, some of the finest specimens of conglomerate are seen near the passes; Thagla, Mulingla, Kungribingrila and Lampiya Dhura. Owing to the intensity of uplifting forces and consequent folding, twisting and deep erosion, only the highly resistant crystalline rocks such as granites, gneisses, and conglomerate could hold their heads high. Fantastic forests of spires, mounds of conglomerate and immense columns of granite rocks rising smooth and sheer for 2,000 to 3,000 metres are encountered in the upper reaches of the Himalayan chain.

The upheavals must have been intermittent. The major ranges of the Himalayas are generally parallel to each other and follow the main lines of intermittent folds and faults. The process is still going on and occasionally gives rise to disastrous earthquakes for the adjustment of uplifted blocks by the force of gravity. The earthquakes have been a regular phenomenon all along the mountains. Memories of the recent earthquakes over vast areas in Karakoram (Krishna Giri) and Dhauladhar in Himachal Pradesh are yet quite fresh. A team of Roorkee seismologists undertook a scientific survey of the earthquakes. They described the phenomenon as teetonic. As distinct from volcanic, teetonic earthquakes occur because of the re-adjustment of rocks after the upheavals. Geologists are of the opinion that the Himalayas are comparatively young and have yet to gain a firm foothold. The convulsions on January 19, 1974 and what followed, which brought about such disasters, were one such attempt on the part of the Himalayas to stabilise and settle down.

Another proof of the rise of the Himalayas and in fact a major portion of the north Indian plains lies in the availability of vast quantities of rounded stones and pebbles all over the area, especially in the Shivaliks. These are the remains of the mightiest river that the Earth has ever seen. As the Sea of Tethys narrowed down, it gave rise to a river flowing east to west. This river has been named the 'Shivalik' or 'Indo-Braham' river. All major rivers of the subcontinent flowing south of the Himalayas and north of the Vindhyachal and Satpura Ranges were its tributaries. The river unloaded its cargo in the ever shrinking Sea of Tethys. Slowly, vast upheavals of the north Indian plains divided this river into various channels. Its tributaries started carving out independent courses. The Indus and its tributaries started flowing west whereas Ganga and Brahmaputra carved new courses to the east. The bed of the Indo-Braham itself got uplifted and formed into chains of hills now called Shivaliks. Vast areas of the Shivaliks consist of shales and various sizes of stones and pebbles studded in the sand. India owes a great deal to this mighty river for her development. Most of the major roads get their surfacing from the remains of this river. But for Indo-Braham, Bhakra Dam might not have been possi-

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ble or might have cost much more and taken much longer to complete. The dam has most impressive vital statistics; total height 225.55 metres, height above river level 167.64 metres, length on the top 518.16 metres and width at the top 9.14 metres. The requirement of concrete for this mammoth structure was 9,042,400 metric tons ! In order to produce dense concrete of the desired quality at a minimum cost, the aggregate had to be washed and separated into various sizes and grades varying from the maximum size of approximately 18 centimetres to grains that would pass through a sieve with 70 openings to a square centimetre ! Indo-Braham river had deposited this material in readymade size near Fatehwal and Neilla villages in close proximity of the dam.

We have accumulated a lot of evidence about the birth of the Himalayas from the oceans. Slowly, the geologists have been able to reconstruct the entire story of the rise.

About 260 million years ago, South India, South Africa, Madagascar, South America, Australia and Antartica formed a single continent known as Gondwanaland. To the north of this vast land mass was the Tethys Ocean extending along the equator from Mediterranean to the China sea. At the beginning of the Eocene period, a huge volcanic discharge estimated at 400,000 cubic miles of molten rock, bigger than the volume of the entire Himalayan Range was poured out from the bowels of the Earth. This resulted in dismemberment of Gondwanaland into its present pieces. India moved north and rammed into the mainland of Asia giving rise to the Himalayas. The uplift continued through the Tertiary era and far into the Pleistocene period. It was Edward Suess who first noticed similarities in the rock formations in the coastal areas of South America and Africa and raised the point that they had been joined at one time in the remote past. He first named this land mass, Gondwanaland. A few years later, Wegener, a German, reconstructed the geology of the past ages and suggested that the continents were actually adrift extending or closing the ocean beds. The continents are still adrift and no one really knows where and how this global journey will end. The latest theory in this regard is the 'Plate Tectonics' theory first enunciated by W.J. Morgan and Xavier le Pichon. As per this theory, the upper crusts of the Earth rest on huge plates probably ten in number, which move in separate blocks. Mountains rise wherever these plates collide.

The push is still on and the scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are of the opinion that the Indian subcontinent is nudging China northwards; moving her an inch a year. Satellite pictures also indicate that India is pushing China towards the Pacific and that these shoves account for China's unusual pattern of earthquakes which are spread over hundreds of miles rather than on narrow fault lines.

What are the latest trends?

There were devastating floods in Bangladesh during 1974. After the

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floods, the ships and launches started encountering under-water obstacles. A thorough examination revealed that this was not merely a process of siltation and sedimenttaion but emergence of a land mass. The story started when a US satellite took some photographs in 1972 that revealed the land formation in the Bay of Bengal. It is now established that a new island of about 50,000 sq kms is emerging near the coast of the Barisal district of Bangladesh. Some areas have already emerged and have been christened as Charjabbar, Charbata, Meghbhasan, Charmasjid and Charkalam. The land is reported to be fertile. It has been predicted by the Aeronautics and Space Administration of the USA that it would take about 15 years for the entire land mass to emerge. Bangladesh has already decided to make the new island the 20th district of the republic. Some islands have already been colonised. It is believed that the land mass is being formed mainly by the sediments, 15 million tons of which are being carried by the three rivers every year. But is that the only cause?

And now about the fossils in our coveted land, the Valley of Gods. Starting from the west, fossils are found in the area of Palamsumda in the valley of river Jadh Ganga. One has to dig about two to three feet and the fossils are almost everywhere. Moving towards east, the fossils are found along the flanks and ravines near the Mana pass in the valley of Saraswati and Niti pass in the valley of Dhauli Ganga. Further towards east we find one of the most gigantic graves of these creatures of the remote past in the Lapthal bowl. This area comes under heavy snow during winter. Seasonal glaciers and avalanches churn up a lot of earth, unearthing fresh fossils every year. One can collect any number from this area though their greatest concentration is between Shalshalla and Sangchomla. Next we see the fossils and some very fine specimens of conglomerate near the group of passes Unta Dhura, Jhandi Dhura and Kungribingrila. Going eastward, the passes of Luwe Dhura and Nuwe Dhura also contain marine fossils. In the Vyas Valley, the fossils are found near the villages—Tinkar and Kuthi and the Lipulekh pass. There are many types. Their scientific names, for whatever they are worth to us laymen are Ammonites, Kellaway-sites greppini, Belemnites of gerardi, Indet nodules and so on. Their ages are generally more than 25 million years and some are well over 200 million years.

These fossils are a common feature all along the Himalayan chain. In Nepal, the upper reaches of rivers Dhudh Koshi and Arun Koshi abound in them. In Himachal, great masses can be collected from Prangla, an inland pass connecting Spiti and Ladakh. They are also sold in curio shops of Simla at fabulous prices. Some of them reach as far as Varanasi where they are sold as priceless treasures.

There are references in old Sanskrit literature about these fossils, where they have been named *shaligram*—meaning a petrified animal. The name *shaligram* is also given to a rounded stone with a white thread in the

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centre. This stone is a product of sedimentation at the ocean floor and later emergence as a rock which has been rounded by centuries of erosion. Obviously, the Aryans knew about the fossils much before the present day geologists.

These fossils have always been associated with good luck. A *shaligram* is considered a lucky possession with a healthy and auspicious effect on the constellations.

Mythologically, they have connections both with Lords Shiva and Vishnu. It is said that when Shiva changes the position of his *samadhi*, these creatures emanate from under his seat in millions. As for Vishnu, they represent his *Sudarshan Chakra*.

The question arises, who is Vishnu? Who is Shiva and what does a change in *samadhi* denote ?

We are where we started from!

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2

Physical Features of Uttarakhand

IN *Kumar Sambhava*, the great poet Kalidasa describes the Himalayas as a measuring rod of the Earth—*man danda* (मानदण्ड). These magnificent mountain ranges are about 2,500 kilometres long and 350 kilometres broad. The Himalayas are the highest mountains in the world. Uttarakhand comprises a mere 350 kilometres of this mighty range, covering the hilly regions of Garhwal and Kumaon with natural boundaries on all sides. To the west, the Dhauladhar Ranges which bifurcate at Bandar Poonchh peak and rivers Tons and Yamuna, separate Uttarakhand from Kinnaur and Mahasu districts of Himachal Pradesh. To the north is the international water shed with 17 major passes. The height of these passes varies from 16,500 feet to 18,800 feet and they are open only during the summer months mainly from June to October. To the east, the river Mahakali forms a natural boundary between Uttarakhand and Nepal. To the south, Terai—a belt about 15 to 20 kilometres wide, made up of thick jungles, swamps and tall grass—separates the region from the plains. Wild animals such as tigers, panthers, elephants, deer, hyenas, bears and pythons which can easily strangle and swallow young calves, find an ideal home here. A multitude of insects can be seen. Till recently, Terai was a virtual haven for tropical diseases and outlaws. Isolated as well as insulated from all sides by natural barriers, Uttarakhand is a region of pristine beauty and charm. Your first and lasting impression here is that of peace.

The *Puranas* refer to this area as Uttarakhand and Kedar-Khand. Maharishi Ved Vyas attached great importance to the region and wrote an *Upa-Purana* about it.

Politically, Uttarakhand consists of the Uttarakhand Division comprising Uttarkashy, Chamoli and Pithoragarh districts, the Kumaon Division with Nainital, Almora, Tehri and Pauri districts and Dehra Dun district of Meerut Division. It is an area of beautiful hills and valleys, rivers and springs and has untold charms and richness of verdure. For the study of the physical features of Uttarakhand, a broad study of the general forma-

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tion of the Himalayas is essential.

The Himalayas, the great 'Abodes of Snow' is not a single range but generally a triple chain of roughly parallel mountains with beautiful elevated valleys spread in between the ranges. These three chains have been referred to by different names namely the Snowy Himalayas or the central chain, the Trans-Himalayas to the north and Sub-Himalayas to the south. These mountain chains themselves do not always comprise a single line but may consist of parallel ranges belonging to the one main system.

Starting with the trans-Himalayan chain, the parallel ranges belonging to this group are referred to as the Ladakh Range and the Kailash Range. These are lower than the Snowy or Central Himalayas and are much more bleak, remote and rather arid. These ranges generally lie beyond the northern boundary of Uttarakhand and we shall not encounter them in our travels.

The main axis of the Himalayas or the central range is called the Great Himalayan Range and runs from Krishna Giri Mountains (Karakoram) in the west to the river Brahmaputra in the east. A beautiful view of these snow-covered mountains is obtained from the hill stations all along the Sub-Himalayan chain like Chakrata, Mussouri Lansdowne, Ranikhet, Kausani, Almora, Mukteshwar, Champavat and others further west and east. This Great Himalayan Chain bifurcates in a good many place to throw off other ranges which form the frame for the middle and lower hills lying between the snowy range and the Sub-Himalayas to the south and Trans-Himalayas to the north. The first of these is called as the Zaskar Range which stretches between the Nampa peak in Nepal to Nanga Parvat in Ladakh. This range generally runs a little south of the water shed in Uttarakhand and has high peaks like Kamet, Abi Gamin, Rataban and Tirsuli.

The second tributary range concerning us emanates from the south of the main axis near the peak of Bandar Poonchh in Tehri-Garhwal and is called the Dhauladhar Range. This range forms a part of the boundary between Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh and runs mainly through Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir. The third bifurcation of the central Himalayan chain occurs north-west of river Sutlej in Himachal and runs south of the main axis. This is the famous Pir Panjal Range separating the provinces in Jammu and Kashmir. Lower than these three distinct higher Himalayan ranges of the central chain are the Sub-Himalayas. These make up a more or less continuous chain all along the entire length of the Himalayas. In Uttarakhand this chain is represented by the line of hills on which the famous hill station of Chakrata, Mussouri Lansdowne, Ranikhet, Nainital, Mukteshwar, Champavat and Pithoragarh are located. The range is called Nag Tibba in Himachal and Uttarakhand and Ranjati in Kashmir. Still further towards south is the Shivalik Range which is so clearly visible as a different chain near Haridwar. Shivaliks have steeper

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slopes on the southern side and profusely forested gentler slopes to the north. Thus we see that in Uttarakhand, we are mainly concerned with five lines of the Himalayan ranges—the Zaskar, the Great Himalayan Range, the Dhauladhar, the Nag Tibba Range and the Shivaliks. Between the Shivaliks and the Nag Tibba there are beautiful valleys called *Doons*. The largest of these is Dehra Dun—about 35 kilometres long and 25 kilometres wide. All these ranges have their own tangled mass of ridges, valleys and peculier verdure. Thus Uttarakhand has a great variety of landscape, climate, flora and fauna. There are scores of snowy peaks, many of which are above 6,000 metres and have their own garlands of glaciers descending in different directions. These peaks, however, are not in a continuous chain and are divided in different groups by the rivers. Thus Bandar Poonchh lies between the Bhagirathi and the Yamuna : Shri Kailash, Matri, Cheerbas Parvat, and Trimukhi Parvat between the Jadh Ganga and the Bhagirathi : Kedarnath, Chaukhamba, Bharat Kunte, Shivling, Karchha Kund, Gangotri Sisters, Bhagirathi Sisters, Shrikantha and Neelkantha between Bhagirathi and Alaknanda : Kamet, Ganesh Parvat, Rataban and Ghori Parvat (all in Zaskar Ranges) between the Alaknanda and the Dhauli Ganga : a huge group comprising Nanda Devi, Hanuman, Dunagiri, Changabang, Lampak, Nanda Khat, Nanda Ghunthi, Nanda Kot, Trishul, Maiktoli and Kalanka between the Dhauli Ganga and the Gori Ganga and Rajrambha and Panch Chuli between the Gori Ganga and the Dharam Ganga. These great ranges are criss-crossed by the drainage of rivulets occurring in different directions which further divide the ranges in spurs, plateaus and valleys. Viewed from a distance, it obviously appears that the ranges are in endless succession which is not really so. In the remote past when the Indian peninsula collided with the mainland of Asia, there must have been reactions and Asia must have resisted this push. Thus the ranges did not rise in one single line but in parallel lines. We have also seen that some of the rivers were in existence before the uplift and have generally stuck to their original courses with minor adjustments necessitated by the toughness of rocks, pushes of the colliding continents and pulls of gravitational forces. Most of the rivers have scooped out deep gorges to resist the change.

The beauty of this setting is extraordinary. For thousands of years, the mountains have been generally unapproachable and remote. In India, the people have always worshipped these beautiful mountains as the Abode of Gods and called this region *Devatma* and *Devabhoomi*. The *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the plays of Kalidasa and, in fact, all ancient scriptures are full of the beauty of *Himavat*. Most of this singular wealth of beauty is yet to be fully explored. Northern regions possess magnificent peaks and glaciers whereas the southern parts have glens and forests of great charm, beauty and richness abounding in flowers and pastures with waterfalls and rock scenery that cannot be equalled anywhere in the world. The fauna is

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equally varied but ruthless killings and poachings have all but exterminated these lovely creatures. One has to travel far into the remote regions to get glimpses of these denizens of the wilds.

The traveller in Uttarakhand would soon realise that the main lines of communications and centres of civilisation lie along the river valleys. Prior to independence, the only roads in existence were, Rishikesh—Narendra Nagar; Dehra Dun—Mussouri; Kotdwar—Lansdowne and Haldwani-Nainital-Almora-Ranikhet. There is now a network of roads.

Most of the rivers in Uttarakhand do not descend from the highest peaks but have their sources in the northern Zaskar Ranges with their own glaciers. On the way, however, they collect water from the Great Himalayan Range. Some of the tributary rivers are, therefore, bigger than the main rivers. Some rivers also take source in the Sub-Himalayas and depend on the springs and the gradual release of water by the trees. The main rivers of Uttarakhand taking source from the glaciers are the Yamuna, the Bhagirathi, the Vishnu Ganga, the Dhauli Ganga, the Rishi Ganga 1 and 2, the Pindari, the Gori Ganga, the Dharam Ganga and the Mahakali. The rivers that rise from the feet of the snowy regions and Sub-Himalayas are the Ram Ganga Western, the Kosi, the Gomati, the Saryu and the Ram Ganga Eastern.

The Yamuna starts from the Yamunotri glacier descending from the Bandar Poonchh peak in the Great Himalayan Range. Further details of the river will be included in our visit to the Yamunotri shrine. The next river is the Bhagirathi. Taking source from the Gangotri glacier, the river is fed by the glaciers of the Zaskar Range as well as the Great Himalayan Range. We shall explore this river fully during our visit to Gangotri. Vishnu Ganga starts from Bhagirath and Satopanth glaciers and is joined by Saraswati at Mana near Badrinath. The latter collects water from the western Kamet glaciers and the Arwa nullah. A little south of Badrinath, the river is joined by the Rishi Ganga 1, the upper reaches of which are believed to be the dwelling place of Sapta Rishi. Near Hanuman Chatti she is joined by the Kishir Ganga and near Gobind Ghat by the Lakshman Ganga. The first major tributary with a number of her own tributaries is the Dhauli Ganga joining the Vishnu Ganga at Vishnu Prayag. The joint stream is called the Alaknanda. Emanating from the eastern glaciers of Kamet, Mana and Abi Gamin, Dhauli collects the waters of Ganesh Ganga starting from Ganesh Parvat, Amrit Ganga descending from the northern slopes of Rataban and other adjacent peaks, Girthi Ganga coming from Kungribingrila with her tributaries the Yong Gad descending from Bara-hoti plains and the Kio Gad from the Lapthal bowl. En route to Joshimath, she collects the waters of the Rishi Ganga 2 that descends from Nanda Devi and has some of the deepest gorges in the world. The Alaknanda collects the waters from the Patal Ganga, the Birehi Ganga, the Dudh Ganga, the Garur Ganga, the Nandakini at Nand Prayag, the

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Pindari at Karnaprayag, the Mandakini at Rudraprayag, and a number of other nullahs.

The next river further east is the Gori Ganga emanating from Milam glacier near the Zaskar peak of Tirsuli. The river separates Nanda Devi group of peaks from Panch Chuli peaks. The Gori is joined by the Moti Ganga near village Baram in Gorichhal and later joins Mahakali at Jauljibi. The Dharam Ganga emanating from the water shed near Darma passes of Luwe Dhura and Nuwe Dhura is the first major tributary of the Mahakali joining at Tawa-Ghat. After the confluence of the Gori and the Kali at Jauljibi, Mahakali collects the waters of the Saryu at Pancheshwar. The Saryu itself has already collected the waters of the Gomti near Bagheshwar and the Ram Ganga Eastern near Rameshwar. There are only two rivers that have independent courses and do not join either the Mahakali or the Bhagirathi in the hills—Kosi rising near Kausani and the Western Ramganga rising through various small rivulets from the jungles of the Sub-Himalayas. Shivaliks have their own rivers; the main ones being the Song, the Koh, the Dabaka, the Nihal, the Bhakra and the Nandhur.

The rivers emanating from the Zaskar and the Great Himalayan Range take source from some of the prettiest glacier systems in the whole of Himalayas. The well known glaciers are Yamunotri, Gangotri and Milam. Gangotri has a number of tributary glaciers like Raktavarna, Chaturangi, Swetvarna, Nilambar, Pilapani and Bhagirathi. Above most of these glaciers are the lateral morains of giant glaciers of the past. Such lines are clearly visible near Gaumukh, the snout of the Gangotri glacier. Most of the rivers have wide open valleys in the Zaskar Ranges, pass through deep ravines and gorges in the Great Himalayan Ranges and then spread out. The river valleys in the higher Zaskar regions are a pleasure to the trekker and a boon to one who seeks seclusion. It is in these higher regions that one comes across wide open plains like the Barahoti, the Nandanban, the Laxmiban and the Tapoban. It is here that one meets some real *Sanyasis*.

As the rivers enter the Sub-Himalayas, they encounter the area where once the Indo-Braham river reigned supreme. Along the banks of these rivers there are fine matrices of rounded stones. This, however, does not mean that the rivers ever flowed there but that once upon a time in the remote past there was a mighty river that lost its identity to the gigantic forces of uplift. In the lower regions, these beds of shale are called *Bhabhars*. In this zone, the smaller rivers disappear completely in the shale or you may say go subterranean. The bigger rivers also lose a lot of water. The area is, therefore, called *Ukhar Bhoomi* or waterless land. Similar areas occur even in Turkistan thus telling the tale of disappearance of many rivers in the bygone times on this Timeless Earth. The rivers then reappear in the Terai where their sluggish course and abundant supply of subterranean water creates marshes. Terai in the local language is called *ban* signifying the rich jungles of the area.

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For the study of the climate, we will now slowly move upwards. As we are aware, Uttarakhand lies close to the tropics but has a great variation in heights. Therefore, we encounter a great many change in climate from month to month, week to week and even during different parts of the day. In the lower regions, the climate tends to be unbearably hot. The same is true of the deeper valleys even though they may be in the close vicinity of high peaks. Examples of this hot and humid climate are Gorichhal, the valley of Gori near Jauljibi, Bagheshwar in the valley of Saryu and Kalichhal, the valley of Mahakali near Dharchula. These areas give shelter to primitive tribes like the Tharus, the Bhoksas, the Rajis and the nomadic Gujars. In the middle regions summers are bracing and the winters not very severe. They are naturally the most highly populated. In the higher zones, the climate is almost arctic and serves as seasonal dwellings for the Bhotias. The Monsoons are severest in the lower regions and the Sub-Himalayas. Monsoons announce their arrival in May-June and departure in September-October with loud thunders and electric storms. The locals ascribe this to the angry moods of Shiva. The severity of the rains goes on increasing till the Sub-Himalayas is crossed and then progressively decreases. In the higher areas, the rainfall is scanty. The process of snowfall is reversed and the winter snow line generally extends along the Nag Tibba Range, Winter is a time of turbulence in the higher zones because of blizzards and avalanches. The avalanches obliterate the terraces and wipe out the villages. Temples are not spared from the fury of this primordial power of nature and the shrines of Badrinath and Gangotri have had their share of damage and destruction. In the year 1882, Mana the last village near Badrinath was completely destroyed. Some of the bigger avalanches dam up the rivers causing formation of seasonal lakes and even changes in their courses. It was one such avalanche that compelled Sutlej to change its course from near Bhatinda to the vicinity of Ferozepur. It is interesting to note that in the *Markandeya Purana*, the course of the Sutlej is mentioned to be independent from that of Chenab up to the confines of Sind. Sometimes an unsuspecting wayfarer sets the whole mass of precariously balanced ice and rock into motion by the vibrations caused by his steps and is carried along into canyons. One comes accross a number of memorials to such hapless individuals at remote places like Badrinath, Barahoti plains and Milam.

The hillman divides the seasons into *Ruri*, the hot season from March to June, *Chaumasa*, the rainy season from June to September and *Hyun*, the winter from October to February. It is but natural that sowing and harvesting seasons would vary according to the heights. As we proceed, we notice that whereas wheat might be harvested in the lower areas in the usual month of April, in the higher regions it will take much longer to ripen and may be harvested after the rainy season.

As for the vegetation, Terai contains a thick jungle belt with swamps, tall elephant grass and reeds. Immediately at the foot of the hills, is the

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country of *Bhabhar* with tropical forests. The region is full of boulders and gravel of the age of dinosaurs. The predominant tree is the *sal*. Above this belt is the transitional zone where both summer and winter get their due. This area is extensively terraced for cultivation. At some places, mulberry trees are being grown to experiment the rearing of the silk worm. Above this line lies the coniferous forest belt with a great variety of trees. The average altitude of this region varies between 2,000 to 3,000 metres. It is in this area that most of the apple orchards are located. The trees in the ascending order are *sal*, *shisham*, different varieties of pines—*deodar*, the timber of the gods, the Himalayan cypress, rhododendron and different varieties of oak. In the highest regions are the birches (*Bhojpatra*). Above this range lie the fine grassy fields that appear during the summer and lie hidden and insulated under the snow during winter. They contain succulent grass that quickly fattens the sheep of the Bhotia and Gaddi graziers. Generally speaking, the orchids are scarce in Uttarakhand but a fair variety is obtained in Gorichhal, Kalichhal and Darma. Uttarakhand is self-sufficient in fruit as well as other crops. The area has a great potential for growing vegetables. Some varieties of potatoes namely *Dunbar* and *Arran Banner* were introduced from Scotland and have obviously liked their new home.

Then we come to the lakes and the lake land of Uttarakhand. Huge dried up lake areas like the valley of Doon must have got uplifted along the Himalayan chain. The beautiful valley of Kashmir itself was once a lake. The water in these lakes either dried up slowly or some outlets were created by forces of erosion and the water drained off. Other lakes might have been formed by action of landslides and debris from the surrounding hills partly blocking the rivers and nullahs. A recent example of this is the Sumna lake created on Keo Gad near Sumna by the crumbling of a hill. Formation and drainage of the famous Gohna lake in Chamoli district may be quoted as an example of the changes that go on. The Gohna lake came into existence near village Gohna on 6 August 1893 by a huge landslide blocking river Birehi Ganga. The lake was thrice the size of Naini Tal. On 26 August 1896, one side gave way causing devastating floods. On 10 October 1910, the lake again overflowed and the resultant floods took lot of *sadhus* to their heavenly abode! Embankments were made in 1930 and the forest department released some trout. The lake became a popular resort of the anglers. On 22 July 70 there was a cloudburst which made the lake overflow and break one side. The lake disappeared on 26 July, 1970.

The process goes on. Some of the other major lakes are Naini Tal, Bhim Tal, Naukhuchia Tal, Sat Tal, Khurpa Tal, Malwa Tal, Deoria Tal, Dhondi Tal, and many other small lakes. Glacial lakes have also been formed high up in the Great Himalayas by moraine blockades or landslides caused by erosion. In this category fall the mysterious yet famous Rup Kund, Karnakul Kagbhusandi, Vasuki Tal 1 near Gaumukh and Vasuki

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Tal 2 near Kedarnath, Chorabari Tal, Satyapha Tal, Chhota Mansarovar, Bank Kund, Lok Pal, Dev Tal, Pari Talab, and numerous others in the higher regions which are yet to be discovered.

The whole of Uttarakhand is studded with springs and almost all of them have good potable water. The sources of some springs have been covered and channelled into beautiful outlets carved out of stone like a tiger's mouth, a cow's mouth, a goat's mouth, and so on. These covered springs are called *baolis*. Some hot springs are also encountered mainly near Yamunotri, Gagnani on the way to Gangotri, Badrinath and Gauri Kund enroute to Shri Kedarnath.

There have been occasional conjectures about the location of volcanoes in the higher regions. Recent studies reveal that the illusion of smoke in the higher zones was caused by fine particles of snow blowing around the peaks like dust in the strong gales. These winds are a characteristic feature of the Great Himalayan Range above the heights of 3,000 metres. There is a thick pall of so-called smoke around Nanda Devi in the mornings as well as evenings. The Kumaonis believe that goddess Nanda burns her morning and evening fires to cook food for Shiva. The very name of Panch Chuli has originated from the illusion of smoke (*Panch* : five, *Chuli* : fire place). It is believed that the Pandavas live on these mountain peaks and burn their hearths early morning. At most of the places, these strong winds blow during set periods of the day. In Harsil, in the valley of Bhagirathi and Malari, in the valley of Dhauli Ganga, this time is between 11 O'Clock and 5 O'Clock. In the higher glaciated regions these winds create eerie wailing sounds. In the lower areas, they assume the form of bracing cool breeze.

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3

A Brief History of Uttarakhand

HISTORY and legend are so intricately woven in Uttarakhand that it is difficult to separate one from the other. Uttarakhand in fact has no ancient historical records and its heroes have for generations lived through legends and bedside stories. For our present account, history is not of paramount importance but a knowledge of major events is likely to lend depth to our travels. Let it be known then that the land you now tread on is *Punya Bhoomi*, the holy land where our mythological heroes dallied and ancestors worshipped. It is here on the banks of the river Saryu that Shri Ram spent years of exile along with Lakshman and Sita. It is in Uttarakhand that Shakuntala fell for Dushyant giving rise to one of the greatest love stories with unbearable pangs of separation. The epic *Mahabharata* was written in this Valley of Gods.

Talking of epics, we are aware that they have associations with almost all parts of the subcontinent including Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh and impart a sense of unity to this vast land. In Nepal, a whole range of mountains is named the Mahabharat Range. In Nilgiris in the south, many places are associated with the exile of Shri Ram. The same is true of the Vindhyachals. The Pandavas are believed to have spent years of exile in Nagaland where some monuments are encountered on the Dimapur-Kohima road. Pinjore in Haryana and Gangotri in Uttarakhand have similar claims to have hosted the sons of Pandu during their *banavas*. Kot Kangra, in Himachal was called Bhim Nagar after Bhim, its builder. Huge rocks all over the country carry the stamp of the sporting pebbles of Bhim. One such group exists at Mount Abu in Rajasthan. Legend has that Bhim was sent to clear Kulu of the demons and supporters of Kaurvas. Tandec, the demon king sent his sister Hurimba, also called Hurma and Hidimbi to kill Bhim by deciept. Hurimba, however, fell in love with Bhim and eloped with him. A temple of Hurimba now stands in the Dunagiri forest near Manali at the place of her first meeting with Bhim. They had a son, Ghatotkach, more of whom will be noted hereafter.

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The claim of Uttarakhand to have hosted the Pandavas during the various ups and downs of their fortunes is stronger than of any other part of the country. The associations of various incidents in their lives with different places in Uttarakhand have been carried through generations but have not changed their essential character. Rishi Vyas who wrote *Mahabharata* lived in Uttarakhand. Two widely separated caves, one near Badrinath on the banks of the river Saraswati and the other near Kuthi on the river Mahakali served as dwellings for the sage. The valley of the river Mahakali in fact is called Vyas. This name was unfortunately altered to Byans by the British on the same lines as Ganges and Benares.

It is quite unnecessary here to revive the controversy of whether the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are pure myths or based on historical events. Their hold over the masses is such that they cannot be mere fiction. As per the findings of the Indo-German Association based on archaeological excavations, the *Mahabharata* war was fought around 3134 B.C. There is no doubt that as time passed, the events were exaggerated somewhat. That is but human. One ancient name of Uttarakhand is Panchal-Desh meaning that the five Pandavas lived here. They are considered as semi-divine beings and figure as such in numerous folk tales.

On the Milam glacier is Surya Kund, a spring of tepid water where Kunti is said to have begot Karna by Surya. Raja Pandu got married to Kunti at Pandukeshwar near Shri Badrinath. The capital of the Pandavas was at Dwarahat. Lohughat has claims to have been the site of the *Mahabharata* war. The very name Lohughat (blood bath) is indicative of the association of the place with the war between the Pandavas and the Kaurvas. The Kaurvas lived in Chakrata where they are worshipped as demi-gods and Pandavas are considered demons. The Pandavas ascended to heaven from the Himalayas. Various places in Uttarakhand claim to have witnessed this ascent. The steps to heaven—*swarga rohini*—are situated near Yamunotri as well as Badrinath. The Bhotias of Vyas are of the opinion that it was their valley that hosted the Pandavas during their last days on the Earth. They started on their heavenly journey from Kala Pani, the source of the Mahakali and moved towards the Panch Chuli mountains. In the valley of Bhagirathi there is a plateau on the spurs of Mt. Shrikantha which is named *Dropadi ka danda* because she perished there during their ascent to heaven. All these accounts will be described in detail in the relevant chapters. It is sufficient to say here that we are entering the land of legends and mythology.

The very name Kumaon is derived from *kurma*, the tortoise incarnation of Vishnu giving it a mythological colouring. Legend has that Shri Ram sent the head of Kumbhkarna, the brother of Ravan to Kumaon through Hanuman who left it near Champavat. The skull filled with water and formed a lake about eight kilometres broad. During the fight between the *devas* and *danavas*, Vishnu assumed the form of a tortoise or *kurma*

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to destroy the demons. He dragged many *danavas* and *rakshasas* to the lake and killed them. The scene of the battle came to be called *Kurmachal* signifying the victory of right over wrong. As time passed, *Kurmachal* was replaced by Kumaon. The lake remained for three *yugas—sat*, *dwapar* and *treta*. During the *Mahabharata* war, Bhim was assigned the task of driving away the *danavas* from Himavat. He sent his son Ghatokach to clear the area of Kumaon. Ghatotkach was, however, killed in the battle with the demon king Angadesh. Bhim then took over to avenge the reverses and death of his son. He broke the skull of Kumbhkarna to inundate the territories of Angadesh. After the victory, he constructed two temples, one each in memory of his son and wife on a hill near the battlefield. The temples still stand and the former is referred to as the shrine of Ghatakdevta. They are situated near the village of Phungar, approximately two kilometres to the east of Champavat. Are these incidents and coincidences mere legends? Or do they indicate some historical occurances and geographical changes? The elements of history and geography are of course clearly discernible. It is interesting to note that the adjoining area of Tibet too has connections with the Pandavas. The history of unified Tibet started under *Maharathi* Karna, who entered Tibet through Johar and established his kingdom there. Accounts, however, differ and it is also believed that Tibet was unified by Rupati who fought on the side of the Kaurvas. After the defeat of the latter, he fled to Tibet disguised as a woman. Because of this incident, after Rupati's death the women came to rule the land which came to be called as the Kingdom of the Queens. Huen Tsang, the Chinese traveller visited this kingdom and has left vivid accounts about it in his travelogue. The husband of the ruling sovereign was called the king. The men of this kingdom conducted the wars and busied themselves in agriculture and so on.

As per the Tibetan legend, Rupati saw the vast Tibet plains from Kungribingrila, liked their exotic looks and started moving towards them. During his descent, he was met by a band of graziers who asked him where he came from. Rupati pointed towards the mountains. Since they could not speak each other's language, they had to communicate in gestures. The graziers thought he had descended from heaven. They quickly improvised a wooden chair and took him back on their shoulders as their king. He came to be called as *Nya Khri Tasan Po* literally meaning 'The Neck-Throne Hero'. This imposing title was commonly adopted by the nobles and kings of Tibet prior to its occupation by China. Also the native name of Tibet, *Bod*, which means 'fled' is suggestive of the above incident. Some scholars believe that the name *Bod* was given to Tibet by the Pandavas because Rupati fled to that land with his followers. Many historians agree that around 600 B.C. some Indian princes colonised Tibet and their rule lasted for about 1,300 to 1,400 years. It is not out of place here to mention that the Tibetan script was imported from India

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and is written like *Devanagri*.

The *Mahabharata and Ramayana* are thus inextricably woven with the legends and folk-lore of Uttarakhand and the adjoining areas and it is more than likely that their roots lie in history.

The *Mahabharata* also includes a long list of tribes dwelling in these areas; the *Yavanas*, the *Sakas*, the *Kambojas*, the *Nagas* and the *Khasas*. The *Khasas* or *Khasias* were in majority and most of the present population are their descendants. The first dynasty was of the Katyuris who ruled from the eighth to the sixteenth century and whose kingdom extended from Sikkim to the extreme western regions. It is interesting to note that for generations the people in the north-western hill areas were called *Khasias* whereas the ruling dynasty was referred to as Katyuris. Even in Afghanistan, which was a part of the Indian empire or under the suzerainty of India, the rulers and the ruled were referred to as *Katura* and *Khosas*!

Katyuris were Suryavanshis. They had their capital at Joshimath from where they shifted it to Kuttor, the present Baijnath. Some ruins of their dwellings still exist near Baijnath and Dwarahat.

Huen Tsang visited this area during the reign of the Katyuris and has left the accounts of this flourishing Hindu kingdom in Uttarakhand. He has described the city of Mayapur near present Haridwar. From here he went to the capital city of Brahampura which has been variously identified as Uttarkashy and Joshimath. His writings have helped us to surmise that Katyuris ruled over Uttarakhand for many centuries. They had their capital at Joshimath from where they shifted it to Baijnath. In a temple at Bagheshwar there is an inscription on a stone giving the names of some Katyuri kings and different sects of the society inhabiting the capital. The Katyuri dynasty declined because of the cruelty and oppression of its later rulers who frequently took away able-bodied boys and girls as slaves. The legend goes that during the reign of Dham Dev and Bir Dev, the slaves were made to form a chain over 20 kilometres long to get water from a favourite spring. Bir Dev, the last Katyuri king used to fasten his palanquin to the shoulders of the bearers so that they could not throw him down. His ruthless tyranny became so unbearable that two men ultimately jumped down a precipice with the palanquin of Bir Dev. On his death, quarrels broke out in the family and the kingdom got divided into many small principalities. The tributary states also threw away the yoke of the Katyuris and their downfall was complete. Independent *Khasia* kingdoms arose in the areas of Askot, Doti, Kali Kumaon and Almora. The petty chiefs constructed forts and fortresses on hill tops and declared themselves as soverigns. Garhwal got separated from Kumaon and their history started following separate courses.

In Kumaon, the Chand rulers (953-1790) with their capital at Champavat and later Almora, consolidated a multitude of petty states into an empire. Raja Gyan Chand (1373-1419) was the first to gain recognition by

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Feroz Shah Tughlaq, the Sultan of Delhi. The Shah bestowed the *jagir* of Terai on Gyan Chand. Raja Bharti Chand (1437-59) overthrew the yoke of Doti from Kali Kumaon after a prolonged war lasting 12 years. We shall hear a lot more about this *Raja* in the later studies.

Raja Kalyan Chand (1560-1565) consolidated the whole of Kumaon under his banner and shifted the capital from Champavat to Almora. The next notable ruler was Raja Baz Bahadur (1638—78) who invaded western Tibet via Kungribingrila in 1670. Baz Bahadur kept getting reports of the harassment of the pilgrims to the holy Kailash and Mansarover by the Tibetan authorities and decided to settle the issues by force. He laid seige to the fort of Taklakhar. Johari Bhotias would proudly tell you that the damage caused to the fort had not been repaired till 1962. Tibetan authorities sued for peace and agreed to provide all facilities to the pilgrims. In 1743, the Rohilla army attacked Uttarakhand from the south under Mohammad Khan and indulged in a merciless plunder. The Rohillas struck terror in the people by their cruelty and acts of vandalism. The power of the Chands slowly faded away. In the twilight of the Chand dynasty, one Harsha Dev Joshi, prime minister and commander-in-chief, became a virtual king-maker. In 1790, he invited the Gorkhas to occupy the area of Kumaon. It is note-worthy that the treaty or *dharmapatra* allowing the Gorkhas to occupy Kumaon is in Sanskrit—perhaps the last treaty in the language of ancient India. The Gorkha Army spread the myth that their king was an incarnation of Gorakhnath and destined to rule over the mountain tracts.

In Garhwal, the Pawar nobles of Chandpur unified the small feudal *garhs* or forts into Garhwal. Ajai Pal (1460-1519) was the first effective ruler and laid the foundation of the empire. He shifted the capital to Srinagar in 1517. Raja Man Shah (1517-1610) waged wars constantly against Kumaon and subdued the ruler of western Tibet. The Mughal emperor conferred the title of Shah on him in recognition of his heroism. Raja Fateh Shah (1684-1716) was a powerful ruler. He led successful raids against the Rohillas and drove them out of the Shivaliks. He ousted the Tibetan brigands from Barahati and extended his power into Tibet. Bhotials claim that a hat, coat and sword belonging to him are still lying in the temple at Daba in Tibet. We shall hear more about him later. The Rohillas attacked again in 1757 and the Garhwali Raja, Pratap Shah (1718-72) bought peace by giving Doon to them. Dehra Dun remained under the Rohillas till 1770. Pradyumna Shah (1787-1804) was the last *raja* of Garhwal to have held the entire territory under his sway.

The Gorkhas moved into Kumaon in 1790 and tried the annexation of Garhwal in 1791. Their attention was, however, diverted against the Chinese who committed aggression in Tibet. In an attempt to check the onslaught of the Gorkhas, Pradyumna Shah offered to pay them a yearly tribute of Rs. 25,000. For a time the arrangement worked but ultimately

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Garhwal was conquered by the Gorkhas in 1803. Dehra Dun was captured in 1804. Under the able leadership of Amar Singh Thapa, the Gorkhas pressed on to Kot Kangra. In 1814, the British declared war on the Gorkhas. After a grim fight, the British succeeded in wresting control of Uttarakhand in 1815. The Anglo-Nepalese treaty of 1815, signed at Sagauli fixed the Mahakali river as the eastern boundary of Uttarakhand which had always been so. Garhwal was divided into Tehri or independent Garhwal and British or Pauri Garhwal. Raja Sudarshan Shah (1815-59) was reinstated by the East India Company. He shifted his capital to Tehri.

The Gorkha rule has been much maligned by most of the western writers. Capt Hearsy, in a letter described the Gorkha commanders as "ignorant, subtle, treacherous, faithless and avaricious to an extreme."* This was quite uncalled for. The Gorkhas introduced the system of free meals to the pilgrims of Kedarnath. They constructed and repaired temples. The temple at Gangotri was built by Amar Singh Thapa. They also constructed roads from the Mahakali to the Alaknanda. The current road systems in Uttarakhand generally follow what they did. The only objective report of the Gorkha character is by Mr. Fraser. Commenting on the fight by the garrison of Kalanga in 1814-15 he writes:

> Whatever the nature of the Gorkhalis may have been found in other quarters, there was no cruelty to wounded or to prisoners; no poisoned arrows were used, no wells or waters were poisoned, no rancorous spirit of revenge seemed to animate them; they fought us in fair conflict like men, and in the intervals of actual combat, showed us a liberal courtsey worthy of more enlightened people†.

The first British Commissioner was Mr. George William Traill (1815 to 1835). He was a man of great zest and energy and tried to introduce various reforms. Other names in the administration of Uttarakhand are Batten and Henry Ramsay. Their rule, however was not much different from the British *Raj* elsewhere. An incident illustrating the type of rule and justice they administered is worth quoting. Commenting on the suppression of the First War of Independence in 1857 in Uttarakhand by Henry Ramsay, E.S. Oakley writes:

> The officials had received orders to track down and destroy all such runways, and on one occasion a dozen of them had been surrounded and taken. Sir Henry himself had no liking for the task of executioner, but a European named Lyall, who was with the party, had no such squeamish feelings. The prisoners were made to stand along the edge

**Himalyan Districts*, II, p. 625.
†*Ibid*, p. 639.

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of a cliff overhanging a river, and Lyall with his revolver sent one after another to his account, each man toppling over the height as he received his death wound. One only of the number escaped, not having been mortally stricken and got off by swimming to the other side. Sir Henry himself acted with great promptitude when the disaffection threatened to extend to the hill province. For days he went about with the key of the Government Treasury in his pocket, and when two faquirs arrived in the Almora bazar to preach sedition, he had them hanged out of hand.*

Those sad days of revenge, passionate sorrow and indignation are over now and the land you tread on is the ancient land of Uttarakhand where freedom is the very essence of what nature is trying to convey.

**Holy Himalaya*, pp. 19-20.

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4

The People of Uttarakhand

BEFORE we embark on our travels, it is only proper to know the type of people we are likely to encounter during our sojourns in this holy land, the *punya bhoomi*; for after all is said and done, it is the people that add to the attractions of an area. One of the most outstanding characteristic of the Uttarakhand *nivasi* is that though he is exceedingly sincere and straightforward, he is the least communicative. For centuries, the people have been enclosed by natural barriers; their isolation being seasonally broken by the *yatris*. This has imparted an ingredient of self-reliance and introversion to them and they are neither very expressive about their feelings nor vociferous about their rights. Throughout ages, they have borne the vicissitudes brought about by the elements and are godfearing. You are in the midst of a people generally free from evil propensities. As Walton has recorded, "Their honesty is beyond question. A verbal bargain is seldom repudiated and theft is almost unknown"*

Doms, the so called *shudras* are believed to have been the original inhabitants of Uttarakhand. Their origin is lost in the sands of history. They claim to have been in these hills before Lord Shiva came to dwell there. Some similarities between the *Doms* and the tribes of Hindukush have, however, been observed. As a general rule, which may spill over on either side, the names ending with 'Ram' indicate a *Dom* descent. Thus Hari Ram, Gyan Ram and so on would denote a *Dom*. The *doms* have their own religions *gurus* and generally worship different incarnations of Shiva. Usually they work as masons, farm labourers, carpenters and blacksmiths. *Hurkiyas*, a community of Dancing Girls are *Doms*. The Arya Samaj has done a great service in the uplift of the *Doms* who now prefer to call themselves *Shilpkars*. Some of them have even started using 'Singh' and 'Sharma' with their names. Talking of the significance of titles in Uttarakhand, Singh means a Rajput and Datt or Chandra signifies a

*Garhwal Gazetteer.

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Brahmin. In addition, a title derived from the name of the village is added at the end. Thus Milamwal means a resident of Milam, Garbyal, of Garbyang, Thaplyal of Thapli, Naithani of the village Naithana and so on. Kishan Singh Milamwal would mean a Rajput from Milam and Chander Datt Garbyal, a Brahmin of Garbyang. Returning to the *Doms*, during marriages, they now openly use palanquins for the bride and bridegroom which was previously a privilege of the higher castes. Most of them even now live in separate areas near the village called '*domana*'. These distinctions and discriminations are, however, fast crumbling.

The earliest immigrants into the north-western parts of the country including Uttarakhand, are believed to have been the *Kirats* and *Nagas*. The influx of the Aryans elbowed these tribes out to the eastern parts; *Kirats* to the higher hills and *Nagas* to the lower areas where they still live as tribes in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.

The early European historians, namely professors Benfey and Weber thought that the Aryans entered India through Uttarakhand. A later study of the *Vedas* suggested a different route through Punjab and subsequent entry into Uttarakhand. It is, however, possible that certain members of the vanguard entered through Tibet. Whichever way the Aryans came, their influence was such that older tribes either moved out or slowly assumed the Aryan coloration in a subordinate role.

Due to their intermixture with *Kirats* and *Nagas*, the Aryans residing in Uttarakhand developed a broader religious outlook and came to be called as *Khasa* or *Khasia*. It is pertinent to note in this context that even in Afghanistan, the people were for generations called *Khosa*, an undoubted variation of *Khasia*. Atkinson, who carried out a detailed study of the tribes residing in the north western areas felt that *Khasias* formed the main ethnic group from Kabul to Teesta.

In addition to the above immigrations, there have also been times when the defeated princes and warriors took refuge in these hills. What all migrations, clashes and upheavals have taken place in this vast mass of mountains since the dawn of history and pre-history is difficult to say. But many who came to Uttarakhand, chose to stay on. We thus meet Telugu speaking Brahmins settled at Dev Prayag; *Chaudharis* of Dwarahat migrated from Kot Kangra; remnants of a Mongol army are believed to have strayed on and stayed on in Darma; *Tharus* and *Bhoksas* settled in Terai claim that they are immigrants from Rajasthan; hundreds of *sadhus*, Indian as well as foreign, represent all provinces of India and many countries of the world.

One of the most notable and affluent immigrant communities of Uttarakhand are the *Chaudharis* of Dwarahat. They came from Kangra to take up high jobs in the courts of the rulers. Many of them still use the titles of *Kanungo* and *Daftary*. They worship the Jwala Mukhi Devi of Kot Kangra. As per their belief, Parsu Ram destroyed the Kshatriyas render-

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ing the men leader-less. The law of the jungle prevailed. The men prayed to the Almighty and performed a *yajna*. From the sacred fires arose four Rajput tribes called *Agnikul Rajputs*, namely *Parihar*, *Pawar*, *Solanky* and *Chauhan*. *Chaudharis* of Dwarahat claim descent from the *Pawars*. It is believed that the custom of *sati* was introduced in Uttarakhand by the Chaudharis. They also claim to have brought some painters from Guler in Kangra who introduced the Kangra school of painting in Uttarakhand.

After the major influx of the Aryans, there have been but minor excursions into Uttarakhand by various groups namely the Rohillas, the Gorkhas and the Europeans. Of these only Gorkhas colonised the area to some extent and a sprinkling of these hardy hillmen of Nepal is encountered all over the countryside. In the close vicinity of Nepal, a fair proportion of the population is still of Nepalese origin. *Gorkhali* or *Nepali* is also extensively spoken and understood in the valley of river Mahakali. The other languages, *Garhwali* and *Kumaoni*, are derivations from *Hindi*; though as we move higher, the effect of *Tibetan* becomes more pronounced. With that background, let us now meet the people.

Starting from the south-west, namely Rishikesh and Dehra Dun, the first noteworthy tribe we meet are the *Gujars*. They are nomads and seasonal visitors to Uttarakhand, mainly to the valleys of the Yamuna, the Bhagirathi and the Bhilangana though some '*deras*' get scattered right up to Ram Ganga Eastern. *Gujars* are of Skythian descent and came as raiders in the third to the sixth centuries B.C. At one time they were the rulers of Peshawar. They are mostly Muslims. They have great faith in Saeen Lakh Data who was a mendicant of the community.

The men dress up in the *tehmed* with a turban or a peculiar cap as head dress. The women wear black embroidered shirts and *churidar* pyjamas. Some of the *Gujaris* are strikingly well formed and beautiful. With aquiline features, fair complexion, impressive figures and radiant health, the bevies of *Gujaris* are indeed a pretty sight along the roads. Their children, though clothed in rather unwashed and drab black coloured attire, charm the visitors by their beauty and innocence.

The *Gujars* are spread along the hills to the west in Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir. They are a god-fearing people and all the milk of some buffalos is given as alms on Fridays. They are devoted to their cattle and their movements are decided by their requirements. During season, the roads are clogged by droves of buffalos, the main wealth of the *Gujars*. Their business acumen is well illustrated by an incident. Over years, I befriended a *Gujar* family visiting the Bhagirathi valley. I used to buy *ghee* from them. Once I tried to bargain and said that in any case I had no more money to give. After some haggling, the *Gujar* came up with a new approach. Said he, "*Janab-i-ali*, please pay the full amount. What will my *Gujari* say? As it is she calls me a *buddhu*!" It was a cosy feeling that

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nagging was the common fate of all men. I had to relent.

For winters, the *Gujars* concentrate in the Shivaliks and Terai areas of Dehra Dun and Rishikesh. The trancehumance practised by the *Gujars* has been in force for generations. Recently there have been some thoughts to settle them permanently in the Shivaliks. This might have a salutary effect for the wild life of the area.

In most of the other southern areas, we encounter two interesting tribes, the *Tharus* and the *Bhoksas*. Terai is their permanent home. Quite a few of them live by the chase and depend on the produce of the jungle.

The *Tharus* claim descent from the armies of *Ranas* Jaimal, Taran Singh and Fateh Singh of Chittor. It is said that they fought in the great war between Ram and Ravan. Unable to stand the din and danger of war and privation of an alien land, they trembled with fear (*thartharaya*)! Hence, their name. Ashamed at their conduct and jeered at by others, they decided to hide in the jungles where they live to date. *Tharus* have an interesting tradition. It is believed that most of the men were killed in the battle. Their wives, perforce lived on with the servants who were also Rajputs but of lower order. By custom therefore, the ladies are superior to the men and not only treat them like servants, but also do not permit them to enter the kitchens!

The *Bhoksas* claim descent from Jagdev Singh, a Rajput descendant of Raja Bhoj. On account of family feuds, they deserted their homes and moving towards the rising sun, reached Terai. Their dresses are similar to those of the people of Rajasthan and the *ghagra* of Jodhpur and Barmer can be seen in Terai.

Both *Bhoksas* and *Tharus* have fine features and expressive eyes. The best time to visit them is around *Holi* when the community is in a gay mood and perform colourful tribal dances. The whole community is literally doused in drinks.

Both tribes have a great belief in the supernatural. At night, an unearthly quiet descends their habitations for no one stirs out for fear of ghosts. It is strange that even educated people have not shed their superstitions and prejudices.

Close relatives of the *Tharus* in their primitive ways of life and traditions of royal descent are the *Rajis* of Gorichhal. The *Rajis* evince enough interest for a separate study and will be dealt with in a later chapter.

Moving upwards, we come across extensive settlements of the *Khasia* Kumaonis and Garhwalis. They are a hardy people and live by the general norms of the Hindu Society.

One type encountered all over Uttarakhand are *Dotials*, the Nepalese from adjoining area of Doti in Nepal. They have been praised far and wide as porters of great stamina and honesty. They are seasonal visitors. During summers, great throngs cross the Mahakali and fan out into the farthest points of Uttarakhand. During winter, most of them return to

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their own homes. They are staunch Hindus. They never sit idle and when not otherwise employed, knitsocks, scarves, pullovers and other items for sale. *Dotiyals* are better than the local porters and if you have a choice, bear this in mind. They have a great stock of travel tales and legends of absorbing interest. They can, therefore, be good companions. Many of them claim to have seen men in Tibet with ears so long that whilst one is spread to cover the cot, the second comes in handy as a blanket!

During our study of the physical features, we have seen that the Great Himalayan Range precedes the Zaskar Range. Before we cross over, we have to meet one more distinct class, the graziers of the Great Himalayan Range called *Anwals*. The villagers trust their flocks to these hardy men who move with the composite herds to the higher meadows. The *Anwals* are found all along from the Bandar Poonchh to the Nanda Devi. They are full of legends about the area and have been a valuable source of information to me. They are all worshippers of the goddess Nanda who forbids the accompaniment of ladies in the higher regions. The loss of animals due to natural causes or by predators is settled by producing a limb of the dead animal. Cheating is unheard for Nanda Devi does not permit that crime.

On the higher regions, between the Great Himalayan Range and the Zaskar Range live the Bhotias. Their physical appearance is of a mixed Aryan and Mongol origin but they claim a pure Rajput descent.

The Bhotias of the Bhagirithi and the Jhanavi valleys are called *Jhads*, of the Alaknanda and the Dhauli Ganga as *Marchhas* and *Tolchhas*, of the Gori Ganga and Ram Ganga Eastern as *Shokpas* or *Rawats*, of the Dharam Ganga as *Darma* and of the Mahakali as *Vyas* and *Chaudas*. *Jadhs* and *Darmas* are not strict about caste whereas the *Marchhas* and the *Tolchhas* are quite particular about it. The *Shokpas* and the *Vyas* generally believe in only two castes, the Rajputs and Brahmins.

Some of the *Jadh* Bhotias claim descent from the people from adjoining Kinnaur and Mahasu districts of Himachal and some inter-marriages still take place. In matters of religion, *Jadhs* are an admixture of Bodhs and *Shaivite* Hindus. This peculiarity is manifest outside their *gompas* of the Shakya Muni where a dome-type Shiv *Linga* is erected near the entrance. All around villages, the *khadas* or the cloth flags are hung on the tracks to ward off the evil spirits. Many Tibetan refugees have intermixed with *Jadhs* and now it is difficult to tell one from the other. *Lohsar*, the Tibetan New Year Day falling on 15th February and *Shivratri* are celebrated with equal gusto. Among *Jadhs*, love plays a more important role in marriage than the parents. The groom has, however, to pay bride-price called "Milk Money" to the mother-in-law and only then the alliance is recognised legally.

The biggest village of the *Marchhas* in the Alaknanda valley is Mana near Badrinath. The legend goes that *rishi* Madhakta lived in this village.

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His *ashram* came to be called Madhakta Puri which later become Manapuri and Mana. The chief deity of the *Marchhas* is the god Ghantakarana. Marriages are arranged by parents and as elsewhere are solemnised after payment of the bride-price. Almost everyone carries a sword or shield at the time of marriage which serves the dual purpose of warding off 'aggression and ghosts'. The *Marchhas* have a peculiar custom for disposal of the dead. The body is carried to the Satyapha or the Satopanth lake and floated in it. The upward winds move the body towards the Badrinath peak by which the departed soul is believed to be ascending towards heaven. The body is then recovered and brought to Keshav Prayag for cremation. The ashes are later immersed in the Satyapha lake. People are fond of staging religious and social plays. Mana is the only village of the Bhotias that has its own dramatic club.

The valley of the river Dhauli Ganga is also called Niti after the name of the biggest village in the area. The Bhotias of this valley are called *Tolchhas* and claim to be the original inhabitants of the Himalayan highlands. The *Tolchhas* are the best looking people in whole of Uttarakhand and the charm and beauty of the ladies of Niti is unmatched elsewhere. They are Rajputs and inter-marry with *Marchhas* and *Shokpas*. They are staunch Hindus. In addition to Lord Shiva and god Ghantakarana they worship the Ghamsali Devta and Bampa Nag full details of which are given in the By-ways. *Tolchhas* have a number of other gods. Panch Pawa is the god of the forests and is worshipped every month. *Janmashtmi*, the birth of Lord Krishna, locally called as Jity Bagdwar Mela is a great occasion of sanctity and people go far and wide to have a bath in the glacial lakes of Bank Kund and Lok Pal. *Nag puja* is performed in September-October in a grand style with goat sacrifices. *Tolchhas* are very patriotic. One of the finest functions in the valley is Independence Day celebrations on 15 August when young boys and girls sing national songs and perform skits and dances to highlight the benefits of unity and disciplined life.

Bhotias of Gori Ganga are called *Shokpas* or *Rawats*. They are the most shrewd businessmen and, therefore, wealthiest amongst the entire community. They are avaricious in money matters and are very close-fisted. Bhotias of Ram Ganga who are also *Rawats* are called Jetha Bhotias. At one time, they were free to trade anywhere in Tibet because some of their ancestors had served in the Tibetan army. So great was their stock that when some *Khampas* looted their villages in 1820, Tibetan authorities compelled the miscreants to return the booty.

Darma Bhotias live in the beautiful valley of Dharam Ganga which is the richest high region in verdure. The area is, however, subject to avalanches and cloud-bursts. In 1846, these natural calamities swept off most of their cattle and they had to incur heavy debts from the landlords of Almora. Some families have yet to pay off these debts! A cloud-burst in

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1971 added to these liabilities.

The *Darma* Bhotias have at times been considered the descendants of the Mongol armies of Temur-Lang. As per G.W. Traill, the remaining soldiers of Temur's forces were driven into this remote valley by more aggressive opponents. The *Darmas* themselves, however, claim to be of Rajput descent.

In the eastern-most part, in the valley of the river Mahakali live the *Vyas* Bhotias. *Rishi* Vyas lived in a cave near Kuthi. The entire valley and its inhabitants therefore came to be called *Vyas*. They are mainly *Shaivites* and worship *Rishi* Vyas also as an incarnation of Shiva.

The marriage customs of the *Darma* and the *Vyas* are interesting and require an elaborate description. Marriages are made at the *Ranga Bang*, a club meant for the young people. Normally, all major villages have a separate building as *Ranga Bang*. Smaller villages share a building which is generally equidistant from the member villages. The girls of a village invite the boys of the neighbouring villages to a sing-song in the club. The invitation to the *Ranga Bang* is conveyed by two girls climbing a vantage point and waving a white cloth, each holding one end. By the evening gaily attired boys converge on the club, whistling as they move. The whistles announce their arrival to the girls who come out of their houses to greet them. Among the *Darma*, the boys and girls stay on at the *Ranga Bang* for a number of days. No relatives accompany them. Only the food is provided by them. The young people remain together for a week or more. The custom is more popular among the *Darma* than the *Vyas*. It is but natural that other Bhotias claim different lineage from the *Darma* even though the men proceed there at the first available opportunity. Many folk songs express the inner desire of younger people to go to Darma, the valley of free love. Affections develop and bloom into love. It is inevitable that some 'natural' children are also born. They, however, enjoy equal status with others and are called *Ranga Bang ka ketaa keti*.

At last a couple who are most suited to each other happily go home to get *ex-post-facto* sanction of the elders for their marriage. During their residence at the *Ranga Bang*, the pair sing ribald songs together. If the girl wins in the vocal contest, the boy has to go to her house to beg her hand in marriage and vice versa. Negotiations are normally the preserve of the couples' uncles.

It is noteworthy that this peculiar custom of 'Youth Club' serving as a marriage bureau is also common in many other tribes. The Ao-*Nagas* call these clubs *Arajo*; the Lohtas, *Champo*; the Rengmas, *Rensi*; the Angamis, *Kitchuki*; the Changs, *Haghe*; the Chakhesang, Zeiliang, Kuki and Sema *Nagas*, *Morung*. The custom is also prevalent among the Gurungs of central Nepal who call these clubs *Rodighars*. The Bastar tribes of Madhya Pradesh call them *Ghotuls*. In the eastern parts of the country, there are separate youth clubs for boys and girls. After the age of about

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ten, the children rarely sleep in their parents' homes. These youth clubs serve as training grounds for the younger generation in the tribal arts and crafts. At night, the boys are allowed to visit their sweethearts at the hours fixed by the village elders. These timings are generally indicated by the rising and setting of some planets, stars and constellations. Many folk songs of the *Nagas* therefore tell of the cruelty of the early setting stars!

At the day fixed for the marriage, the boy visits the girl and forcibly takes her away. The girl's people take out swords and hot words are exchanged. At times, they even come to blows till someone suggests that after all every girl and boy should marry and why not marry the young lovers in peace. This custom of mock fight is also not peculiar to the Bhotias. In Andhra Pradesh, for example, an exchange of blows between the bride and the bridegroom's parties is a part of the marriage custom amongst the *Khonde Reddy* tribe.

The management of *Ranga Bang* is generally left to the unmarried girls or married women without children. Strangers are also admitted, provided their presence is acceptable to some members. Married women without children are a special attraction for the free lancers. Divorces are quite common; more so in childless couples. If a married woman prefers to live with another man, her first husband is entitled to compensation. The process is unending and a woman may thus marry a number of times, though the depreciation is higher every time! A divorce is, however, final only after the husband has handed over a white piece of cloth to the wife which is believed to impart the necessary purity to her for the new alliance. This custom is also similar to the *Jarikhata* of the Gorkhas. *Jarikhata* literally means the 'Running Account'. A girl thus marries any number of times but depreciation goes higher and higher. Thus the younger society is almost in a state of flux till the blood in their veins tends to cool off. Even up to old age, the affections of some women remain fickle.

Bhotia women generally enjoy a higher status than their *Khasia* sisters. Unlike *Khasia* women, they resent oppression and ill usage, and normally act out of free will even in open defiance of relatives and friends; more so in matters of real emotional attachment.

As a community, the Bhotias live in peace and good neighbourliness. Their frank sociability, their cheerfulness and love of fun and frolic and a ready wit are very refreshing. A traveller will always part with them with a feeling of regret.

In the highest meadows, we encounter yet another type of shepherds and graziers. Gaddis, the traditional shepherds of Himachal bring their flocks to these regions for seasonal grazing. I have met these hardy men enjoying the solitude in the remote areas. To avoid clashes, the pasture lands are allotted by their own cooperative committees. The boundaries are fixed by *nullahs*. The Gaddis of Kangra have a society in Dharamsala which does the allotment. All major pastures have names like Dudatoli, Dhakuri,

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Nandanban, Lakshmiban and so on. They use their own sheep and goats as beasts of burden, loading some of them with about five to seven kilograms of provisions in small bags called *karbozas*. Their knowledge of herbs and edible plants is thorough and they can give you roots and herbs to match good coffee and highly blended tea. At night, the flute of the shepherd resounds with melancholy in the lonely valleys. Back home you miss those haunting melodies.

Last but not the least, there are two more groups of people needing description. Near the shrines, you may encounter the *Pandas* or the Brahmin guides some of whom can be more of pests than guides. The provisions of the Badrinath Act given under the appropriate chapter are your safeguard against them. The other type are the *sadhus*, *rishis* and *munis*. You may meet a number of them near the shrines. Many of them are enlightened souls. There are also a number of *sadhikas* all over Uttarakhand who generally live in the temples of Durga and Shiva. It is the presence of these enlightened souls that imparts holy vibrations to our coveted land, the Valley of Gods.

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5

Dancing Girls of Uttarakhand

As is now well-known, *Doms* were the original inhabitants of Uttarakhand. Not much is known about their origin and some think them to be related to the gypsies of the Hindu Kush Mountains. They might have migrated to Uttarakhand region some thousands of years back and, enclosed by natural barriers on all sides, evolved their own culture. One of the offshoots of the *Doms* are the *Hurkiyas*, a tribe of dancing girls. The sole profession of the tribe is dancing and singing by the women while the men play on musical instruments. *Hurkiyas* have changed little with times and their culture has been retained in an almost original form in the remote valleys inspite of a comparatively easier access to the areas since the nineteenth century. This institute might have originally evolved as a mode of worship of the gods but soon started forming an essential part of entertainments.

The advent of the *Nagas* and *Kirats* made little difference to the ways of life in Uttarakhand. These tribes were of an equally broad outlook. It is interesting to note that in Punjab an extra fashionable and sophisticated lady is even now called a *Kiratan*! It is strange how the memories of the past are passed down in the idioms.

Uttarakhand was thus inhabited prior to the arrival of the Indo-Aryans. In the pre-historic society, women-folk took a free part in all the ceremonies and dancing by the young girls was a normal pastime of the Uttarakhand *nivasis*. The early Aryans seem to have adopted the ways of the Uttarakhand society. This might be one reason that these people came to be referred to as *Khasias* or *Dasyus* of inferior stock rather than the pure Aryans. As Muir has recorded, some of the Aryan writers of the plains levelled the charge of extra boldness against the Uttarakhand women who "sang and danced in public, drank and undressed, wearing garlands and perfumed with unguents."* These objections, however, died a natural death since the Aryans were by no means a purianical race. This is

**Himalayan Districts, II, pp. 275.*

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evident from old Hindu classics like the *Kamasutra* and even writings of Kalidasa, which are full of sensuous charm. These classic dancers have, therefore, endured with time and have passed down from generation to generation as the *Hurkiyas*. Their traditional instrument is the *hurka* or a one-sided drum resembling the *damru* of Lord Shiva. The *Hurkiyas* claim that they were the drummers of Mahadev when he came to live in the Himalayas. Even today when the roar of the avalanches or thunder of the clouds echoes and re-echoes in the valleys, the *Hurkiyas* believe that their forefathers are playing on the drums to appease Mahadev. A detailed note of the present-day *Hurkiyas* will be made hereafter.

In tracing the rise and decline of the dancing girls in Uttarakhand, a mention has to be made of *devadasis* or the female slaves of the gods. With the influx of the Aryans and a concentration of their gods in Uttarakhand, they introduced their own institute of the dancing girls in the area, mainly to worship and appease their gods. It was obviously a custom throughout India. References to *devadasis* are made in ancient Sanskrit literature, like the *Padma Purana* of the fourth century, the *Skand Purana* of the seventh century, the *Rajtarangini*, the history of Kashmir by Kalhan, and so on. *Devadasis* were married to the predominant deities of the era or area. In the south, for example, the girls were married to *Yellamma*, a form of Shakti believed to be the incarnation of Renuka, the wife of *rishi* Jagadamani. In Uttarakhand, the girls were either married to Vishnu or Shiva even though they were employed in the temples of other deities. They were the property of the various temples and had their own hierarchy. On the top were the so-called mistresses of the gods or the *devbasavis*. The girls who were thus married to Lord Vishnu were known as the *garudobasavis* and those to Lord Shiva as the *lingabasavis*. They were normally the prettiest girls or those coming from the richest families. As a mark of their distinction, they got the symbolic images of the gods tattooed on their bodies. These girls danced exclusively in the sanctum. A little lower in the social ladder were the *devadasis* who danced twice a day in the morning as well as evening prayers at the temples and all the public religious ceremonies. At the lowest rung were the *brahmadasis*, the slaves of the priests who entertained and danced for the priesthood. Since classic Hinduism always had a healthy attitude towards sex, there is little doubt that these girls also met the libidinous needs of the priests and the well-to-do pilgrims. The main supply of these girls was through voluntary offering of their children by parents to propitiate the gods and to ward off the evil spirits by the supreme sacrifice of their own flesh and blood. Hindu *rajas* of Garhwal and Kumaon constructed many temples and invariably financed the establishment of *devadasis* to serve the gods and goddesses. *Raja* Baz Bahadur constructed the temple of Nanda Devi in Almora, also provided a train of *devadasis* and flower girls for the entertainment of the goddess. This institute of religious dancers was in addition

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to the *Hurkiyas*, the traditional dancers of Uttarakhand. The official census of 1821 records that in that year there were 53 dancing girls in Almora and 30 in Srinagar. Commenting on the population ratio of Joshimath in the same year which had 225 males and 332 females, George William Traill records, "The great proportion of females to males in the latter town may be ascribed to the number of female slaves, the property of the temple of Badrinath."*

Almost all the major temples all over the country had *devadasis*. Mahmud of Gazni found 500 girls in the temple of Somnath. Baron Hugel who visited Jwalamukhi in Kangra in 1835 found more than 20 girls decked with lilies. The institute suffered a temporary setback for a few centuries during the ascendancy of Buddhism. This custom remained till late nineteenth century and even the early twentieth century. In Uttarakhand, some remote villages still have some old women, the *devadasis* of yester years. Fresh recruitment is almost negligible though the custom persists in areas away from the main roads.

In the history of the dancing girls of Uttarakhand a note must be made of the *nayak* girls who for a good five hundred years formed the main source of supply to the brothels of Uttar Pradesh. The *nayaks* owed their origin to the campaigns of raja Bharti Chand against the Rainka *raja* of Doti. The supremacy of the Rainka raja over Kali Kumaon had been acknowledged for generations. Bharti Chand, however, challenged this and declared war on Doti. He collected a large standing army that occupied firm bases on the banks of river Mahakali and invaded Doti. The war lasted for 12 years and Rainka raja was defeated. In these long drawn out campaigns, the soldiers contracted temporary alliances with the women of the area; a practice hitherto unknown. The descendants of such temporary marriages were not admitted into any caste and came to be known as *Khadagwals* or the children of the swords. They were also named as *nayaks***, implying the descendants of a *nayaka*, the Sanskrit wordfor a mistress. The female offspring of these alliances were regarded as *patita* or the 'fallen'. The girls perforce took to dancing and selective prostitution. There was no hypocrisy in their approach to life or the scheme of things forced on them. An elder girl would proudly introduce her younger sister to the profession and protected her from over-exploitation in the earlier days of her trade. Whereas the male *nayaks* started marrying into Rajput or Brahmin families, the girls and their female offspring were exclusively assigned to dancing and prostitution. Born of healthy parents and robust alliances, *nayak* girls were a pretty lot and soon became well-known all over India, with their beauty attracting the princedom. It is on record that in 1554, Sher Shah undertook the siege of Kalinjar to

* *Official Reports p 13.*

***Nayaks in this connotation are different from the Naiks, a well-known and progressive community residing in various parts of the country.*

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secure the possession of a *nayaka* of raja Kirati Chand, the ruler of Champavat from 1545 to 1560 A.D. The *nayaks* normally lived in separate villages of which the main ones were Haldwani and Nayakana. This custom and system, however had a built-in scope for corruption and soon enough a flourishing trade in girls including minors started. On the weekly *hat* days in towns like Pithoragarh, many girls were sold openly. They were also a big draw at the annual fairs. Since this assumed alarming proportions of a social evil, protective legislation became necessary. Two bills called the 'Protection of Nayak Girls' and 'The Protection of Minor Girls' were passed by the U.P. State Legislative Assembly *vide* their Gazette Nos. 2 and 8 of 1929. Under the provisions of the India Act Clause 80-A(3), prior sanction of the Governor-General of India was obtained. The district magistrates were given vast powers for investigation and punishment to put a stop to the evil practice. Hindi translations of the above Acts were published *vide* U.P. State Gazettes 650/17-6-1969 on 13 February 1968. It is a great pity, however, that the trade goes on in the remote regions, mainly Purola *tehsil* of Uttarkashy and upper reaches of river Bhilangana. Since the local officials have vast powers in the matter, there seems to be no reason for the persistence of the evil besides official apathy.

And now we come to the *Hurkiyas*. As already stated above, they are an offshoot of the *Doms*. In their performances, the men folk play on the musical instruments whilst the women sing and dance. *Hurkiyas* are found all over Uttarakhand but now concentrate mainly around the sites of the big annual fairs at Gauchar, Bagheshwar, Thal and Jauljibi. Hurkiya families are also found in adjoining districts of Nepal where they are called *badini*. In some parts of Garhwal as well, the Hurkiya women are called *badini*. Their services are hired out for marriages and for celebrations at the birth of a child. They may also be invited to entertain guests. In earlier times, big landlords and princes had their own families of *Hurkiyas* who were passed down as ancestral property. Edwin T. Etkinson, in his book, *Himalayan Districts* of *North Western Provinces*, records that the *Hurkiya* girls even prostituted and were frequented by British soldiers. This could be an exception rather than a rule.

The *hurka* is normally made from the skins of monkeys, which are acquired from the *Rajis*. Training starts early and it is not uncommon to find small children and teenagers accompanying their mothers and elder sisters in performances. As for dress, very colourful blouses are worn and the married women invariably wear the nose ring.

In the post-Young Husband expedition of 1904 to Tibet, trade between Uttarakhand and Tibet got a boost. Caravan trails crossed the massive ranges and passes in the summer months and great pack trains moved from north to south. This was also the hey-day of the *Hurkiya* girls. The major business of the girls was to entertain the wealthy Bhotias who

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owned and financed some families of the *Hurkiyas* and had priority rights over their services. The girls would dance in the morning prior to the march of the traders and then in the evening after the halt. They would thus leave their masters at the passes and on their return receive them there. In case of a send-off function to a high dignitary, the girls keep dancing in turn at the head of the procession and leave the V.I.P. outside the village. On successful completion of the trade season, *Chakti* would invariably accompany the sing-song. Lewd dancing with tingling bangles and jingling bells would go on well into the early hours of the morning till the frosty silence of the Himalayan nights engulfed the dancers with their half closed eyes and swaying arms. Those days are now a mere memory and I have not met a single *Hurkiya* family who do not talk of them with brimming eyes.

Songs are generally transmitted from generation to generation. The theme varies from duets of love, eulogies of past kings and princes, hymns to local gods, ballads about the legendary lovers, Malu Sahi and Rajula and an inspiring description of landscape. Many songs tell of the home-sickness of boys serving in the army or girls married to far away places, separated from their beloved hills.

Ayo basant Phagun Chait ko bhagi holo aphan mayat,
Timali ko pat na khayo bhat na auni chithi na kusalpat,
Ayo basant Phagun Chait ko bhagi holo aphan mayat.

The spring has arrived but here I am away from my kith and kin. Lucky are they who are enjoying choicest dishes at their parents' homes. And to crown it all, there is also no letter from home.

Himal ko thanda pani gogun paat khaunla,
Swami mero pardes ma jauban kaila dyunla.

A girl feels the pangs of separation from her lover. "I would sacrifice anything to be with you. I can even survive on tree leaves and the cold water of the hills. But when you are away, who shall I offer my youth to?"

Darma ghati Panch Chuli hint ho sayenli nasi jaun
Dam beer nam tero na bhulo Bhotia
Tibbat ko daku mari dukh lai mitia.

In this song the boy suggests to the girl: "Let us elope to Darma, and have a good time under the shadow of the Panch Chuli mountains. The girl, however, reminds him that he is a Bhotia and must go for trade to Tibet. The killing of the *Khampa* robbers would afford him greater satisfaction."

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Almora bai aunchh mai nam chh mero Tara,
Dekhana ki chhoti chhun mai baras ki athara.

Here is an all-time favourite and I have seen crowds really going gay on hearing it. The song dates back to the era of the *nayak* girls. "I young am a girl from Almora and my name is Tara. I may be looking quite but am actually eighteen years old!"

The dance movement for the last song starts with the sinuous, slightly feline elegance. A pair of piercing eyes tend to show precocious experience in all that adds to a woman's strength. But this is all sham and in fact a part of the training. At heart they remain as simple as any other village belles of the hills. Upon the man, however, the effect is exciting. The girls spread longing with every delicate movement of the arm and subtle tone of voice. They sing this song in a great variety of lilting tunes. I once heard it many ways at Baram, a village in Gorichhal, at a function. What a regal feeling it was, even though I was not the only Moghul around! They have lately taken to singing of film songs in which Anand Bakshi is their favourite lyricist and R.D. Burman the most favourite composer.

I think a description of the *Hurkiyas* would be incomplete without a mention of *Hurkiya bol*, a ritual at the time of sowing maize or transplanting paddy. The success of the crop is a matter of utmost importance to the community. It is a time of prayers as well as rejoicing. The services of *Hurkiyas* are hired to amuse the farm workers, mainly women. Before the transplantation starts, prayers are offered to the harvest god Bhumiya or Bhumiyal. Promises of generous offerings in the name of the Lord of Mountains are made. After the *puja*, the first seedling is ceremoniously planted. The women then divide themselves into groups and start transplanting. The *Hurkiya* continues singing the morning prayers facing the ladies and gracefully moves forward as they recede. The *Hurkiya* girls then join and dancing to the tune of the men, enact scenes from the legend of Malu Sahi and Rajula. A combination of one of the most enchanting sights and sounds is the transplantation accompanied by the *Hurkiyas*. At times, the lilting tunes set the toes of the planters tapping and it is not uncommon to see one stand up, have time off for dancing and then get back to work. Sometimes the entire group is carried away by the gay mood and there is a hilarious interval of lot of splashing of muddy water and giggling. The tune charms the whole countryside whilst the spontaneous giggles add sweetness to the atmosphere.

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6

Rajis of Uttarakhand

Royal Men of the Jungle

SINCE the very ancient times, the Himalayas have constituted a subject of intense interest for the scholars, poets, painters, ascetics and explorers. It is surprising, however, that in spite of this long probe the Himalayas have always held some secrets in their bosom. It may be the discovery of a new species of the animals like the golden *langur* (*Presbytis geei*) by E.P. Gee, the unsolved riddle of the snowman, the discovery of new varieties of orchids and flowers or the strange customs of lesser known tribes, the Himalayas have never been lacking in offering something new and exciting to those looking for knowledge. The reasons for this, however, are not far to seek. Communications. The terrain and weather have always made any movement between places an adventure that few would set out on. It is, therefore, little wonder that even in this space age, the Himalayas have preserved the remnants of some tribes in their most primitive form of civilisation. One of these tribes claiming royal descent are the *Rajis* or *Ban Rawats* of the Chiplakot jungles between the Gori Ganga and the Dharam Ganga. They are a wandering tribe who generally live off the jungles. They live in makeshift huts and shelters rigged out of bamboo and cane. Quite a few live in the caves. They have pertinaciously clung on to their ancient customs and the advance of the so-called civilisation has made little impact on their ways of life. In the hot and humid summer months, they move up near the two fresh water lakes that mirror the eternal snows of the Panch Chuli peaks. In the lush meadows of the high alps, they spend the summers by the chase. They trap antelope and *langurs* which they relish the most. During winter they move down to the valleys and engage themselves in their age-old profession of making wooden jars which are popular all over Uttarakhand. A major portion of their food is even now the roots, tubers and wild fruits. They also grow little rice, millet and vegetables in small jungle clearings which are used for a few seasons and then abandoned. This method is similar to the '*jhoom kheti*' of the eastern tribes and is called '*katil*' or '*khil*'.

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The *Rajis* claim royal descent and consider it below themselves to salute to anyone. As per the legend passed down from generation to generation, their origin dates back to a pre-historic king of Askot who had two sons. The elder was an ardent lover of nature and very fond of hunting. He spent most of his time in the jungle. When the king died, the throne was usurped by the younger brother who ordered the elder one to stay out in the forest. A fear of the treacherous brother kept the prince on the move. The *Rajis* are his descendants. Even today, most of the *Rajis* are ever on the move and no one really knows their whereabouts.

All food is shared in the community and worldly possessions are kept to the minimum. Greed is totally absent. The elders argue that it was the love of worldly goods that made the younger brother, *rajwar* of Askot, throw out the elder. Since their forefather was cheated out of his kingdom, they still eye every man with suspicion. In the earlier times, they almost never came face to face with outsiders. On seeing some one approaching, the entire community would disappear in the jungle. Their representatives, however, always attended the religious and state ceremonies at the capital town of Askot where they invariably sat next to the *rajwar*. Irrespective of their ages, they always addressed the *rajwar* and his queen as younger brother and younger sister. Previously their day-to-day requirements were met by bartering wooden jars. They approached the villages at night and leaving jars in the vicinity, disappeared in the woods. The villagers collected the jars as required and kept as much grain in the same place as the jars could contain. The *Rajis* revisited the same place the next night and collected the items. This peculiar barter system lasted for centuries. The vessels are used for storing ghee and pickles and making of curd and butter milk.

A second legend relating to the origin of the *Rajis* is based on the story of a Chandravanshi king named Wahin. He was an atheist and opposed the study of holy scriptures. His subjects resented this and killed him. A suitable successor, however, could not be found. On the advice of the *pujaris*, the king's body was churned. A dark dwarf emerged from the left part whereas a fair man emerged from the right. The dwarf was called Nishad and the other child Prithu. The latter was made the king and he conquered the whole world. The Earth came to be called *prithvi* after him. Some of the caste Hindus consider *Rajis* to be the descendants of Nishad. A minor variation of this legend is that Anga, the son of rishi Atri, was the first ruler of the world. His son Vena was a tyrant and was killed by his subjects. It was from his body that Nishad and Prithu were born. Be that as it may, let us trace the legend of Prithu and Nishad to its origin and see if there is any existing link with it from the *Rajis*' point of view. As mythology tells us, the first king of India was Manu, a self-born child of Brahma who was a hermaphrodite. The female half of his body gave birth to three girls and two boys. A series of Manus descended from these

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children and ruled the world. Suryavanshis and Chandravanshis were the descendants of these Manus. During the reign of the seventh Manu, Vishnu warned him of *jal pralya*, the impending deluge that would flood the whole world. Manu accordingly built a boat to save his family and the seven wise sages who had been created by Brahma and to whom the *Vedic* hymns had been revealed. When the deluge occurred, the entire Earth was submerged. Vishnu came in the incarnation of a fish, the *Matsya avtar* and towed the boat to a mountain peak. This party comprising Manu, his family and the seven sages remained there till the flood subsided. The Uttarakhand tradition places the peak as the Nanda Devi. The seven sages are still believed to be living in the valley of the river Rishi Ganga or the 'River of the Sages'. It is significant that some of the *Rajis* still point towards the Nanda Devi as the abode of their forefathers. Worship of the Nanda Devi is an important religious festival and a group dance is performed to appease the goddess. In any case, the belief of the *Rajis* that their forefathers dwell on Nanda Devi gives a clue to some long forgotten incidents which have become a part of legends.

And now let us try and trace their ethnic origin. George William Traill thought them to be related to the *Doms*. There is, however, no resemblance in their looks or traditions. The *Rajis* indignantly repudiate any connection with the *Doms* and in fact sprinkle water drawn from 22 sources to purify the area visited by *Doms*.

Another view probably based on historical research was expressed by E.T. Atkinson who thought *Rajis* to be *Kirats*. We have already seen in our study of the people that the *Kirats* were pushed to the eastern regions by the victorious Aryans. *Kirats* became rulers of Nepal and 22 Kirat dynasties ruled there for ten thousand years. *Kirats* were the rulers when Ashoka the Great visited Nepal in the third century B.C. It is surmised that the *Rajis* of Askot have originated from the *Kirats* thus vindicating their claim of royal descent. Dr. Campbell thought *Kirats* to be related to the *Limbus* who now reside in Eastern Nepal and on the border between Nepal and Sikkim. This would mean that the *Limbus* of Nepal and Sikkim and the *Rajis* of Askot are from the same origin. This probably is true since the *Limbus* in Sikkim still manufacture the wooden jars which are almost similar to the ones carved by the *Rajis*. Other similarities are that both *Rajis* and *Limbus* still make similar bird snares and animal traps and relish the skins of their prey, catch fish not with rod or net but by diverting the channels and tickling them with bare hands from under the rocks. It is not unlikely that the *Rajis* either came to Uttarakhand as an advance party or belonged to the rear-guard of the migrating group who were driven into the jungles by the dominating force of the Aryans. Other similar examples of widely separated tribes belonging to a common origion are also available. The *Brahui* tribe of Pathans, for example, speak a language of Dravidian origin akin to the language of the Bengal hill tribes. As Mr. W. Crooke

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has observed, "It seems clear that the Brahui are either the rear-guard of a body of emigrants from the north-west or the advance guard of those migrating from the south." *Rajis* of Chiplakot could well be the rear-guard elements of the *Limbus*.

It is difficult to carry out a census of the royal tribe for how can you enter into any domestic details with them? They are probably around five thousand in number. G.W. Traill felt that only about twenty families were left in 1823. Capt. H. Strachey who got two *Rajis* caught for inspection (!) felt that there were only five or six families in 1846. The latest figures are based on personal investigation but the margin of error can be quite substantial. Many families live in single huts or caves in the jungles. These single huts are called '*mouvas*.' But how many of them are there?

The jungles are bountiful and there is no dearth of wild fruit and edible roots. In the morning, leaving a couple of old men in the huts, the entire community goes into the woods to collect food. They are experts at making traps which they call *jibali*. For smaller animals and monkeys, the trap is known as *surg*. For massive animals like *thar* and *bharal*, a deep pit is dug and camouflaged with leaves, bamboos and soil. The animal falls into it and is axed to death. Killing is taboo during the breeding season. The jungles, therefore, still abound in all forms of wild life and the call of the barking deer mingles with the sweet songs of the birds as part of the magnificent orchestra of nature. *Rajis* do not drink and do not approve of some of the younger people who do. Those who do, use the juniper bush in the brew as an aromatic.

At birth, no midwives are employed unless some old women are readily available. For two months after the child's birth, the mother is considered untouchable and even the child is not taken from her hands directly. In this attitude towards women at childbirth, they come so close to the *Kafirs* of Chitral, a hill state in Pakistan, that it may almost suggest a common origin or sharing of inhabitance at some place in the remote past. In every *Kafir* village, there is a separate house for the use of the ladies at child birth. This hut which is called '*bashali*' is away from the village at some distance and no one is supposed to come near it or touch the inmates. At childbirth, some old women do go there to lend a helping hand but remove all their clothes outside and enter the house naked or covered with a shawl. Any infringement of this has to be expiated by personal purification and sacrifice of a goat. Any one failing to do this is sure to annoy the gods and fairies who would send down heavy rains to purify the entire community.

The naming ceremony is held on the fifth day after the child's birth. The community *Dhami* is called and after a few prayers a *deota* is said to enter his body which starts shaking. The movements appear quite involuntary. In this religious trance, he mutters the name of the child. The custom, however, is fast dying and child is named at random specially by

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some of the *Rajis* who have settled in the village. Weaning is not done till a child is almost five and many a woman is found with two children being suckled in the Mrs. Micawber style!

The *Rajis* have their own language called *Rwati* which is fairly well developed. It sounds somewhat like the twittering of birds and is entirely different from the local *Kumaoni* or Hindi, thus establishing a different origin to the *Khasias* of Kumaon. A few examples of their language are given at the end. Some words in this language have been found similar to the local dialects of Nepal contributing to the view of a common origin. In their communication with others, some pidgin Hindi is spoken and understood. Some influence of Hindi is also noticeable in their language.

The *Rajis* claim to be Hindus and have Hindu names like Nanda, Parvati, Triloki, Kali, Hayat Singh, Dhan Singh and so on. Most of them still wear the tuft of hair on the head in the orthodox Hindu fashion. Their chief gods are Malikarjan, Bhagnath, Manenath, Khudai, Balichand, Jal Devi and Nanda Devi. Like them, their gods are also cave dwellers. The local deity lives in a huge cave near the Chiplakot lakes. In front of many of their huts, the *trishul* (trident) of Shiva is kept to ward off evil spirits. On the Nanda Devi festival day, they sing and dance forming two rows facing each other. As the ritual progresses, they move around in a circle from left to right.

The dead are cremated. After someone's death, they do not eat meat and refrain from sex for 12 days. In the olden days, they probably buried their dead for that is what Mr. Etkinson has recorded. After disposing of the dead, they move away from the site for a few days thinking the place to be inauspicious and unlucky. Few of them have settled in the villages of Gorichhal but they are treated as outcastes by their brethren in the jungles. Saturdays are inauspicious for travel when the entire community stays indoors. Visitors are unwelcome on Tuesdays, a bad day for meetings. Crossing of one's path by a snake is a bad omen.

Child marriage is unheard of. Till recently, no bride-price was paid. The Askot *Rajis* have, however, adapted this practice from the Bhotias. Chastity in women is held in great esteem. Amongst the same family called *Dharra*, no marriages can take place for three generations. Nothing is spent on marriage ceremonies as such. In fact there is no ceremony at all. The bridegroom selects the bride and after getting the consent of her parents, takes her to the woods! Women have an equal status with men.

Most ailments are ascribed to possession by ghosts, and goats are sacrificed to tempt the evil spirit to leave the victim. There was a mysterious epidemic in 1971-72 that claimed more than two hundred lives and could be controlled only by broad spectrum antibiotics. After that they are regular visitors to the local doctors and *vaids* and have started relying on modern medicine in ever-increasing numbers. This disease has helped to end their isolation in more than one way.

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Some *Rajis* accepted the suggestion of the local officials and took jobs on the Dharchula road. But how are the royal men to obey lesser types? The man-in-charge, a Public Works Department employee whom I met, had not only to salute them but also request them to do their assigned jobs!

Constant search for food hardly leaves them with any time for amusements and their chief pastime is gossiping with a *hooka* passed from mouth to mouth. Every evening, there are small congregations of various age groups and full throated laughter can be heard now and then till late in the evening. They carve out a rude flute from bamboos. The note of the instrument echoes in the glens and dells and is exceedingly pleasing. The elders occupy themselves by training the youngsters in the age-old skill of making bird snares, animal traps and carving wooden jars. As the dusk approaches and the stars appear in the skies, the enchanting tunes of the distant flute takes you to the very heart of this mystic land where time has been almost still for centuries, and the passing of years has been like days. The *Rajis* are in a much lower state of civilisation in the accepted sense of the word. They have, however, a better sense of values.

When all is said and done, can we definitely say who the *Rajis* are? Are they the descendants of *Nishad*, *Kirats*, *Limbus* or *Kafirs*? But is it necessary at all to answer that question?

SPECIMENS OF RWATI

English	*Rwati*
1. What is your name?	*Ni nami huen?*
2. Where are you going?	*Goha gasyan?*
3. Where does this way lead to?	*Ae yan guha car?*
4. Can I get some water to drink?	*Ae yati gawa dhari?*
5. Where do you live?	*Nang gabju cher?*
6. If you become my friend, I shall give you a present.	*Na nand dist na cuchh bayane?*
7. You lead a very tough life.	*Nan jindgi bara tagra han.**
8. Are you married?	*Nand wida jigaya?*
9. Where is your wife? Do you love her?	*Nang miday gab han? I nang nike jibera?*
10. How many children have you got?	*Nang ge degla·honye?*
11. Does any ghost live near your village?	*Nang gaon apa kati bhoot hou ki rai?*

**The influence of Hindi is easily discernible here.*

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English	*Rwati*
Come here	Hitlo
Today	De
Tomorrow	Kile
You	Ni
I	Na
We	Yoghu
I will drink	Netaur
I will not give	Han Wayan
Paddy	Gara
Rice	Daro
Wheat	Ghumar

NUMBERS

One	Ga
Two	Nee
Three	Khur
Four	Pari
Five	Pan
Six	Turkau
Seven	Khatt
Eight	Athh
Nine	Nauv
Ten	Dakh

DAYS OF THE WEEK

Sunday	De
Monday	Kiler
Tuesday	Neev
Wednesday	Kunv
Thursday	Pareekh
Friday	Panch
Saturday	Khatrav

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7

Folk Industries of Uttarakhand

ONE OF the lesser known and explored aspects of Uttarakhand is its exquisitely beautiful handicraft. Their number is small but quantity and quality rarely go hand in hand where cottage industries are concerned. It is, therefore, not out of place to scan through their products and see what they have to offer to the traveller.

Due to literal seclusion, the people of Uttarakhand had to be self-sufficient in most respects. Cottage industries developed to impart this essential self-reliance to the Uttarakhand *nivasis*. The life style of the people is such that the men keep away from their homes over long periods. Prior to the Chinese occupation of Tibet, they spent the summers there for trade and winters in the fairs and marts of the lower regions and Terai. When men are not occupied with trade, they occupy themselves with their other forms of wealth, namely the cattle. They keep huge flocks of sheep and goats that provide them with meat, milk, manure, hides and wool. Tending these flocks keeps them away from their homes in the less trodden alps. In fact more than half the population subsists on cattle breeding. Because of all this the women as well as men find ample time to busy themselves with arts and crafts and production of items of everyday use.

In the colder regions of the Himalayas, it is but natural that the production of wool should be the first to develop. The people have to cater to their own needs and the use of coarse home-spun cloth is as old as humanity. The finer aspects of the industry followed to meet the demands of the gentry and trade. It is not possible to say exactly when these commercial improvements were introduced. The shawls of *pashmina* wool and the carpet industry have the indelible mark of Kashmiri and Persian influence. The local tradition has that the Katyuri Rajas employed Kashmiris to weave shawls for them. There is also a possibility that the traders of Uttarakhand and Kashmir met in the common market of Tibet and exchanged their wares and knowhow. In the development of the wool industry, Warren Hastings played a major role. He was keen on making substantial profits and

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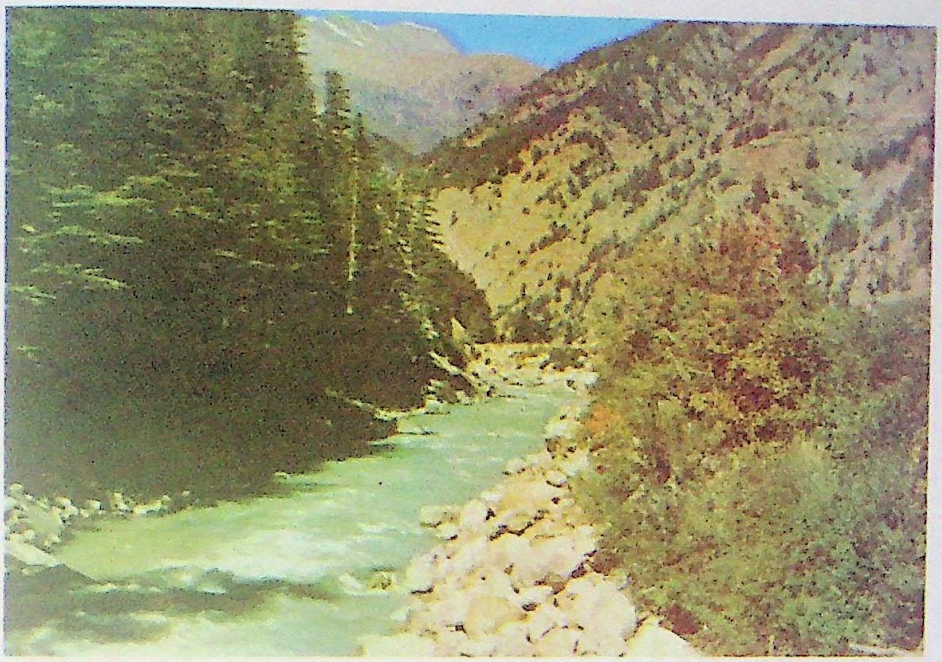
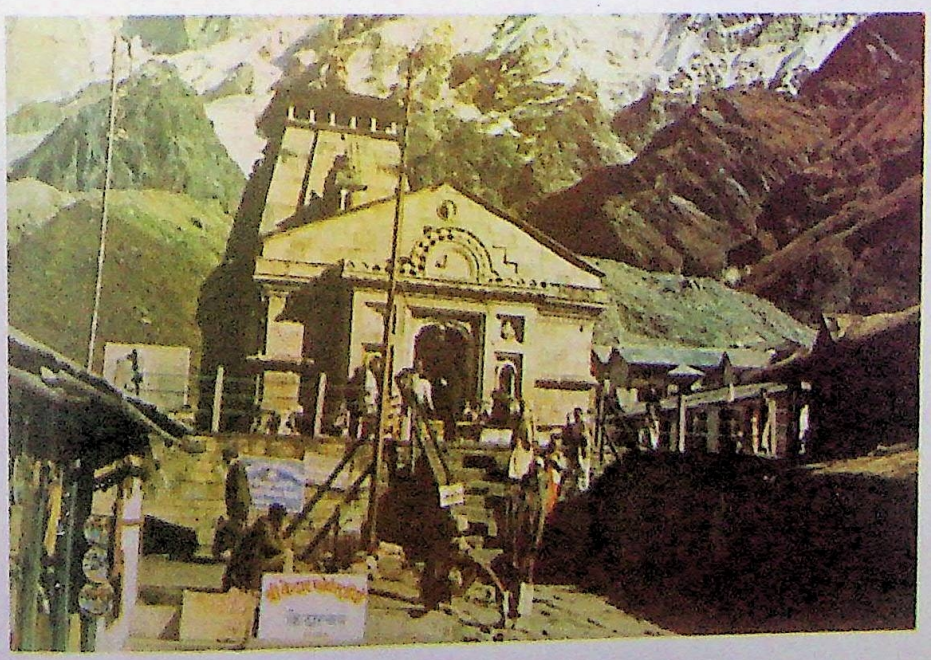


River Bhagirathi near Harsil

Kedarnath



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The Valley of Flowers

Khasia girl with her Bhotia friend

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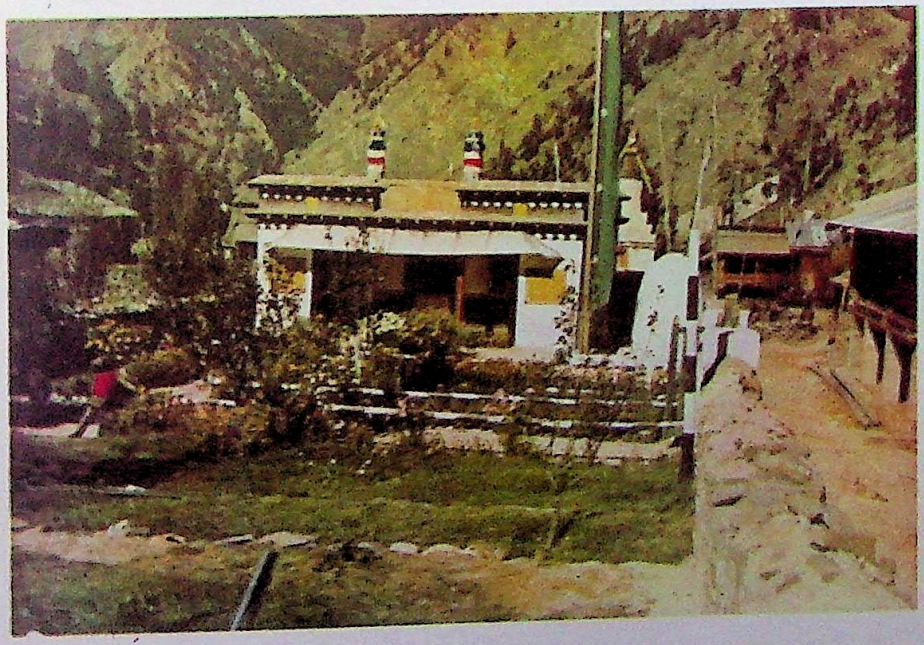
A Bhotia family on the move

Shakya Muni's temple at Vagori



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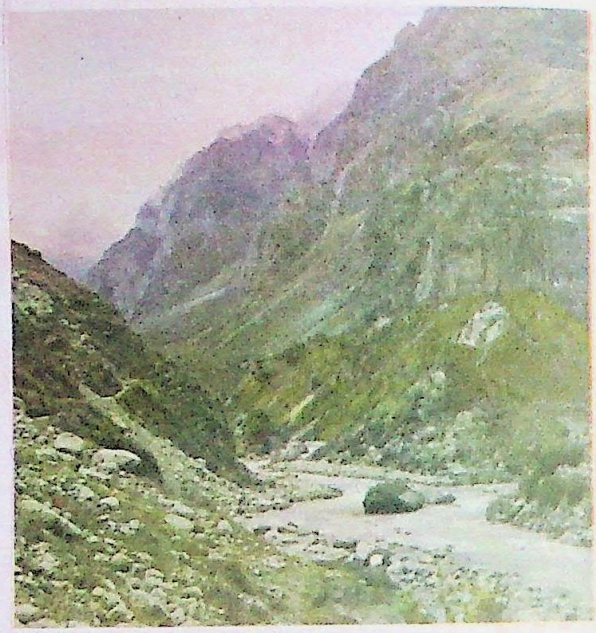
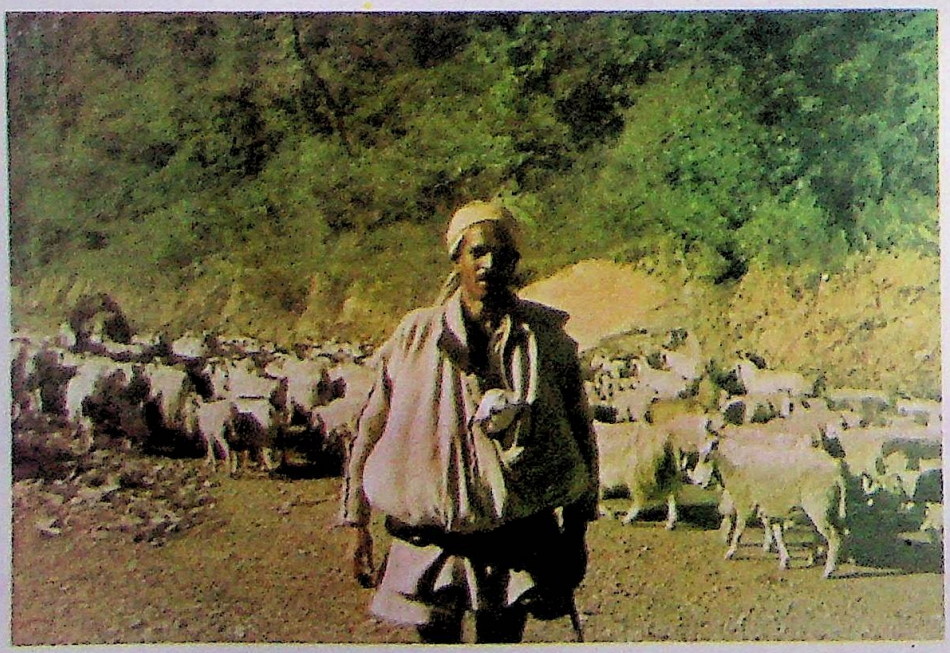
A serow kid in the Zaskar ranges



Keshava Prayag near Badrinath

A Gaddi grazeer



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encouraged one William Moorcroft to explore the Tibet market. Moorcroft was a veterinary surgeon by profession who took a fancy to the sturdy and sure footed hill ponies of Tibet. He wanted to experiment cross-breeding them with horses. The Tibet government, however, did not offer free access to the foreigners. Consequently, Moorcroft and a Hyder Jung Hearsy, natural son of a Bengal infantry officer, disguised as *sadhus*, Mayapuri and Hargiri, and in 1812 crossed over into Tibet through the Niti pass. After a market survey, they returned via Lipulekh. They were captured by the Nepalese authorities and freed after the intervention of Bhotia brothers, Bir Singh and Deb Singh. The sons of these Bhotias later became the famous Pandit explorers of Tibet. Moorcroft again went to Tibet and never came back. It is believed that he was killed by the *Khampas* near Mansarover.

The wool trade with Bhot was encouraged by pioneers like him and large quantities started exchanging hands first in Tibet and after import in the annual fairs of Uttarakhand.

Before we explore the woollen products of Uttarakhand, it is not out of place to trace their origin and introduction in this country. The shawl industry came here from Persia with the Muslim invaders. The Muslim rulers, specially Qutab-ud-Din Aibak accorded official patronage to the industry. The Moghul emperors, Akbar, Jehangir and Shahjahan tried to introduce the industry in other parts of the country, like Patna and Agra. A present of shawls became a favourite practice among the gentry. To live with the times, the rajas and nawabs of the smaller states and *jagirs* always sent some shawls to the emperors of Delhi. Akbar introduced a new fashion in the use of two different coloured shawls, one over the other. This could well be the forerunner of the present day reversibles. The rajas of Kangra employed some Kashmiri weavers at Nurpur and from there the industry travelled to Uttarakhand. The early western traders took a fancy to the fine but simple and elegant woollen garment which became a craze of the fashionable ladies of Europe in the nineteenth century. Josephine, the consort of Napoleon Bonaparte had a collection of more than three hundred shawls. It is interesting to note that in the treaty of 1846 with Kashmir, the British included a clause by which the raja was required to send some shawls to Queen Victoria every year. The elderly Bhotias still claim that quite a large percentage of these were bought from Uttarakhand. I met one such man at Milam where he was employed as a *chowkidar* in the rest house. He talked nostalgically of the days when the trade with Tibet was open. His forefathers were proud that the shawls woven by their ladies were presented to *Vilayat ki maharani*.

In the pre-1962 era of the trade boom with Tibet, wool was available in abundance, direct from the markets of Bhot. Big market towns like Gyanima Mandi and Talakot sprang up along the Uttarakhand-Tibet border. While the men were away on their trading missions, the women had enough time to devote to the conversion of raw materials into finished goods which were

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then marketed in the annual fairs of Uttarkashy, Gauchar, Gopeshwar, Bagheshwar, Thal, Devidhura and Jauljibi.

Talking of fairs, more than three hundred annual fairs are held all over Uttarakhand. Most of the products of the cottage industries are available there. These fairs are important to the society and, therefore, a religious colouring is invariably given to them. The fairs are held either at shrines like Bagheshwar, Gopeshwar and Uttarkashy or at the holy places like Jauljibi and Devidhura. The fair is opened by a prayer at the shrine or a mass dip in the river. The days of annual fairs are public holidays. The farmers are required to observe '*Ajota*' or a non-ploughing day, lest the gods should feel offended. The marketing activity in the fairs starts in November and continues up to April. After the Young Husband expedition of 1904 into Tibet, trade with that country got a boost. Due to affluent trade, the turnover of money at the fairs was tremendous. At Bagheshwar for example, the turnover was normally more than 3 lakhs. Not only did it lead to professional jealousies but vices like drinking orgies and prostitution also became rampant. The *nayak* girls and other minor girls were openly traded. The women of Uttarakhand deeply resented these vices and bade their men to refrain from drinking. Their threats were of course ignored. The elders in Johar still tell an amusing account of the time when the women went on a sex-strike to bring their husbands down on their knees! The unhygienic conditions added to the dangers of epidemics. Devastating fires frequently broke out and were more often than not caused by foul play. All this necessitated the enactment of a regulating legislation. Thus during 1938, the United Provinces Fairs Act came into being. The district magistrates were given discretionary powers to decide the layout of the shopping places so as to ensure cleanliness. Fire fighting arrangements in all the shops became compulsory. A fine of a maximum of Rs. 100 was levied on the defaulters. In addition, minor offences could be fined Rs. 2 per day. Trade in the *nayak* girls and minor girls had already been banned since 1929. These Acts were rigidly enforced and the emphasis at the fairs shifted back to their legitimate purpose, i.e. trade. The fairs are still held and the people eagerly look forward to them but turnover of trade is much less and ever dwindling, There is, however, a great scope to develop one's own raw materials, and trade with the plains can fully replace trade with Bhot. The enterprising Bhotias are ever out to explore such possibilities.

In the absence of the men, the women have their own clubs and guilds for get-togethers, singing and competing with each other in spinning or knitting. Their output in such clubs is tremendous. Lately the *chandan charkha* of Gandhi has become very popular. This custom of competitive spinning is called *ranth* and is similar to the *bhora* of Punjab. In *bhora*, the girls in a Punjab village go round inviting their friends for an all-night spinning session. Tea and refreshments are provided by the host. It then becomes imperative of others to return the hospitality and the show goes

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on and on. A *ranth* is a great attraction for young girls and most of the scandals are hatched there. Huge quantity of hand-spun wool is produced.

The wool comes in three distinct qualities and is utilized as such. The sheep and the goats of the lower regions yield poorer qualities of wool which is spun into ropes and bags. At times some coarse blankets are also woven out of them. The produce from the sheep and the goats of medium heights up to 3,000 metres is utilised for carpets of a better quality and *dans* whereas it is the high altitude goats that yield the wool for shawls. The finest quality shawls are made from *pasham* and are called the *pashmina* shawls. *Pasham* consists of the soft fuzz nearest to the body of the small goats living at heights of 4,000 metres and above.

Pasham comes in two natural colours; off-white and light greyish-brown. Some coarser hair also finds its way in the wool and is prickly in nature. The purity of *pasham* depends on the thorough cleaning out of this hair. The wool is washed thoroughly in hot water and cleaned. The dyeing may be done in bulk at this time or after spinning. Till 1962, the best quality *pasham* was always imported from Tibet. With the closing of the trade, however, the *pasham* now comes from Nepal, some of which is undoubtedly imported from Tibet. This double exchange raises the price along with a rise in the cost of production. In spite of this setback, however, the industry is thriving.

Spinning is done by men as well as women. Weaving, however, is left exclusively to the latter. Training starts from early childhood. Girls are required to make their own garments. So great is their love of the home-spun that they even weave their own *amluagra*, the garment used for covering the dead. Men are completely debarred from weaving and defaulters are fined by the girls of the village; more so in Johar, Darma and Vyas. The fine may be in money, sweets or drinks and is paid without a grudge. The culprits are generally admitted into the rejoicings. There are, therefore, some habitual offenders! It is a clever way of getting into the coveted company and many a time leads to love affairs.

Near every house and hamlet, there is a small piece of ground where the women sit and weave elaborate materials. They take out their primitive looms to bask in the sun and weave. Their colourful material are silhouetted against the patches of snow and offer a pretty sight. The skill is handed down from mother to daughter. In the higher regions, vegetable dyes are used though in the lower areas aniline dyes are fast replacing them. The colour sense of the Bhotias is highly developed and is almost instinctive.

There are a number of government-sponsored industrial centres, the notable ones being located at Harsil, Jhala, Uttarkashy, Dhonda, Gopeshwar, Didihat, Kapkot, Bagheshwar, Pithoragarh, Mansiary, Dharchula and all big towns like Nainital, Mussoori, etc. The products include exquisite quality carpets and shawls and a variety of other items like cardigans, blankets, *thulmas* and woollen cloth for making coats and pyjamas. In describing their

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products, it is essential to dwell only on those that are marketable and have a scope for further development. In the items prepared from wool, shawls figure the highest. For *pashmina* shawls, the valley of the Gori Ganga is the foremost. The shawls are closely woven and every thread is beaten in thoroughly. Sometimes they produce the self-designed materials of a sophisticated nature. The shawls are mostly available in two natural colours of *pasham*. *Pashmina*, however, takes well to dyeing and colours can be matched as required. A good shawl costs between Rs. 175 to Rs. 225, which compared with Kashmir is still quite cheap. The *pashmina* shawls are being slowly replaced by the shawls from the wool of the Australian sheep which are being bred experimentally at various centres. Their wool is soft and warm and the product is elegant and pretty. The finest shawls of the latter variety come from Uttarkashy and Didihat. They are dyed in various colours to match different *sarees* and are fit for the wardrobes of most fastidious ladies. There is a real scope for expansion of this industry. Raw materials are available at hand and costs vary between Rs. 50 and 60 a piece. In addition to the finer quality shawls, *pankhis* are made from the wool of the low altitude goats and can meet the demand of the ladies who are more keen on warmth than softness.

Thick spongy woollen blankets, white, black or mixed are also woven from coarser wool. The pieces are first woven in widths of half a metre by two metres and are then stitched together to make into single or double blankets called *thulmas*. After weaving and stitching, the items are fluffed up with coarse bamboo combs till a soft fuzz comes up. *Thulmas* have a primitive rugged beauty of their own. The look is elegant and warm. They are available all over Uttarakhand but the quality of the items available in Dharchula is the best.

In the carpets, the usual size is two metres by one metre. The produce is called a *dan*. The Bhotia women devote a lot of time to the weaving of *dans*. The patterns are generally of Tibetan of Persian origin. Most women have also acquired the necessary knowhow to carve their own design in which they exhibit tremendous dexterity. They are past masters in copying a design so that you can easily get your good old possessions duplicated. Next to *dans* come the *asans*, small carpets of about 80 cm square. They are mainly used for *puja* and sitting around the hearth for meals or gossip. There is a great scope for the expansion of this industry. The people should be encouraged to manufacture items of bigger sizes.

In addition to the above items, a variety of woollen garments and coarse blankets are made for local consumption but could also meet the requirements of the less fastidious buyers.

In the hills, the produce of the jungles has to have a mention. A great variety of wooden jars are manufactured all over Uttarakhand. The lathe works on the water mill. The vessels are utilized for churning butter milk, storing *ghee* and pickles and even grinding of chillies and condiments. The

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vessels have a potential for export to other parts of the country.

The wood industry has, however, something far more exquisite to offer. The weather in the upper regions of the Bhagirathi, the Yamuna and the Alaknanda is suitable for *papri* trees which yield an almost grainless variety of wood. It is hard, heavy, requires no seasoning and takes well to polish. The texture of the wood is as suitable for carving as the walnut. The Government centres at Uttarkashy and Srinagar produce a great variety of beautiful decoration pieces and utility items like trays, table lamps and fine quality walking sticks. One can also get things made to order after own designs. The industry is still in its infancy and has got a great scope for development.

Yet another one with a promise is the cane industry. Some sorts of rough baskets and mats have been made for ages. The jungles at the altitudes up to 10,000 feet are full of *ningahi*, a type of cane. Though baskets and mats are produced all over Uttarakhand, the small oval baskets of Mussouri serve as decoration bowls for flower arrangements.

Uttarakhand produces excellent honey but this potential is not fully exploited. The honey from the apple blossoms has a sweet fragrance. At present the biggest producers are Johar and Harsil. Only a fraction of the potential is being tapped.

Another industry with a future is sericulture. The silk worm was first introduced in Uttarakhand by Raja Indra Chand in the twelfth century. The industry flourished till the rule of the Gorkhas. It has again been introduced and is developing.

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8

Folk Arts of Uttarakhand

THE FOLKLORE of a people provides an index to their social, ethical and aesthetic values. It is an essential clue to the evolution of their culture and their emotional life. Uttarakhand has very rich folklore. The scenic beauty of the landscape, hills and valleys, glens and dells, plateaus and peaks, meadows and jungles, flora and fauna and rivers and nullahs is such that there is always enough inspiration to burst into a song.

The valleys impart such an aura of mystery to the areas on the other side of the hill that all happenings tend to be coloured with imagination till they assume the shapes of tales from the other world. The isolated regions with difficult means of communication have to cater for their own mass recreations. This is normally done by dances, group songs, ballads and telling of tales of the adventures of the community heroes. As the population grows and the pressure on land increases, some enterprising members migrate to other areas to avail of fresh opportunities. The folklore, therefore, spreads to remote corners of a region and even the world. As time passes, local touches added from generation to generation tend to impart different shades to folklore even though the theme remains the same. Listening to these songs and tales, however, provides a satisfaction of emotional urges and awakens memories lying in the blood. A discovery of similarities in the folklore of a distant land with those back home provides an essential ingredient for fulfilment of the basic instinct of 'home coming.' The folklore of the Indian provinces and regions is thus one of the great unifying factors. A careful study of folklore reveals striking similarities between the tales and songs of remote and visibly different regions which can, therefore, be a means of national integration. The characteristic illustration of this is provided by the tale associated with *karua chauth vrata* which is observed by women all over the country for the well-being of their husbands. They eat before the break of dawn and then after the moon has risen. Not even water is taken throughout the day. The legend

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goes that a prince had a beautiful wife. She loved him dearly and always kept the *karua chauth vrata.* She had seven brothers who had little faith in superstitions and made fun of their sister for it. Once, it so happened that on the day of the *vrata*, they decided to employ a decoy to make their sister eat before the moon rose. Five of them lighted a huge fire in the jungle and two went to her. Pointing to the glow, they said that the moon had already risen. She ended her *vrata.* As luck would have it, her husband was bitten by a snake and fell unconscious. Shocked, she went around in a demented state to discover some remedy for her beloved. She met seven old women and went on touching their feet. The seventh lady blessed her with a long and happy married life. Since her husband was dying, she asked the lady how that could be possible. The old woman bade her go home and remove the needles from the body of her husband to revive him. She went home and discovered to her surprise that the entire body of the prince had been pierced by needles. She kept removing them for twelve years during which she always kept the *karua chauth vrata.* At last only one needle was left. This happened to coincide with the *vrata.* The *rani* thought it auspicious to see the moon first, break the fast and then remove the last needle. She went to see the moon. In her absence, *goli* removed the last needle. The prince got up and thought the maid-servant to be his wife and the *rani* his maid-servant. This lasted for a year during which the imposter aroused his suspicion many a time by unintelligent actions. The rani kept repeating, "*Rani si so goli hoi goli si so rani hoi*" (the queen has become the maid-servant and the maid-servant has become the queen) all the time. At last the *karua chauth vrata* came and the prince discovered who his real wife was. This ended the long ordeal of the devoted wife and they lived happily ever after.

The legend has many local variations but the basic facts are the same all over the country. What may sound strange is that the custom is also prevalent in some parts of Germany where some ladies observe a fast on a particular day for the safety and wellbeing of their husbands! Could that be a clue to common heritage? It is also pertinent to note some of the morals of this legend; it requires personal sacrifices for the success of a marriage; relatives must not interfere even with the best of intentions; respect and regard for the elders has its rewards and so on.

Uttarakhand has an important place in the mythological lore of the country which is also a type of folklore. Mythological tales are common throughout the sub-continent and provide a means of national integration at a macro level. Uttarakhand is important in this context for the area was the scene of most of the incidents mentioned in our mythology. These would, therefore, be related to the grass roots during our travels. Here, it is only intended to give some characteristic tales and songs so as to provide depth to the charm of our travels.

More often than not, a traveller tends to feel that the people of a region

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have no human values. There are wild beliefs that either the men are too cruel or timid and the women are immoral and so on. These negative thoughts immediately insulate the surroundings and a traveller may feel too lonely or discouraged to continue. It is to eliminate these barriers of communication that it is essential to know something about the folklore of a people prior to travelling in 'their' country. It is good to remember that human beings are essentially the same everywhere. Nowhere is this basic fact more beautifully illustrated than in the story of '*Kabuliwala*' by Rabindranath Tagore. There are wild stories about Pathans being child-lifters. One Pathan travels to distant lands for trade. With him, he carries the ink-smeared impression of the hands of his little daughter, a source of comfort to him in an alien land. He makes friends with a little girl, mainly to feel closer to his own daughter. This is the emotional state of this outwardly and traditionally rough man. Further details being of no particular use to us, let us proceed with some common tales from which the readers may draw their own conclusions about life in Uttarakhand.

The most popular one is the tale of Malu Sahi and Rajula sung by the *Hurkiyas* to the accompaniment of drums and flutes. At most of the annual fairs and market days the ballad draws huge crowds.

Raja Dula Sahi of Barahat and Sonpati Bhotia of Johar were both childless. Gangoli, the wife of Sonpati regularly distributed alms and the *rani* of Dula Sahi ordered a *sadavrata*. They worshipped many gods to beget children but in vain. At last the men went on a *tirtha yatra* and reached the temple of Baghnath at Bagheshwar. They both offered all their valuables including earrings to the deity. They also promised to offer gold ornaments and pearls if they were blessed with children. Lo and behold, Baghnath appeared in the dreams of the wives of both Dula Sahi and Sonpati. He told them that anyone, who after a bath at the holy confluence of Saryu and Gomti visits his temple on the first of the month of *Magh* and makes offerings to the *peepul* tree, would be blessed with a child. The first visitor would get a son and the second a daughter. The wives told their dreams to the husbands who heartily consented to the ladies making the *tirtha yatra*. On the appointed day, it so happened that *rani* reached the temple prior to Gangoli. Rani got a son and Gangoli a girl. The boy was named Malu Sahi and the girl Rajula. As the time passed, Rajula grew to be a girl of peerless charm. *Hurkiyas* describe her beauty in great detail. She was as cool and refreshing as the light of the moon and radiant as the sun during *Baisakh*; her beauty grew as the mist during *Chaitra* and cold during *Paus*; She had hair like the dark nights of *Bhadon*; her lips were like petals of a rose; her eyes were like almonds and complexion like flowers of turmeric and so on. She grew up to be a very intelligent girl. One day she asked her mother, "which is the best tree, the finest grain and the most popular raja?" To this Gangoli replied that barley was the best grain. *peepul* the most magnificent tree and the raja of Barahat

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as the most popular and benevolent ruler. After that Rajula saw Malu Sahi in a dream and fell in love with him. Her attachment to this unseen prince grew day by day. If she did not dream of him, she neither ate not talked to anyone the whole day. Worried about her state and thinking her to be in need of company her parents decided to marry her to Chand Vikhay Pal Huniya. Rajula opposed this but her refusal was thought as an act of modesty. Her father got ready to proceed to the market for trade and purchase of items of dowry. Rajula volunteered to go with him to lend a helping hand in grazing the animals carrying the wares. He tried to dissuade her. She insisted. He relented and together they went to Barahat. One day, whilst Rajula was out with the herd, she got tired and fell asleep on the bank of a *tal*. Malu Sahi also came that way on a shikar trip. It seems they were fated to meet. He saw the beautiful form of Rajula reflected in the water of the *tal* and fell in love with her. He kept watching her for hours. She was the girl of his dreams. When Rajula got up, she saw Malu Sahi standing in front of her. She also could not contain herself and rushed into his eager arms. Together they remained in that state for a long time till disturbed by the frantic calls of the brain-fever bird, *papiha* calling *peekahan peekahan*. The moon rose and cast its beautiful reflection in the *tal*. The young lovers resolved to get married and parted with heavy hearts.

On her return to Johar, Rajula's parents decided to marry her off to Chand Vikhay Pal of Hundesh. Vikhay Pal was dreaded far and wide for his cruelty. Even the animals of the jungle were afraid of him. He was an abominable glutton and ate more than five hundred and twelve *seers* of rice a day! How could a delicate girl with petal-fresh youth live with a demon like him? She tried all kinds of tricks and even bribed the mediators with gold but to no avail. Much against her will, she was married. True to his jealous nature, Chand Vikhay Pal kept her behind seven locks. She got sick of him and started planning escape. One day she bribed the corrupt guards of the cruel raja and made straight for Barahat. On her way she reached Someshwar where she was forcibly stopped by the twenty-two Gal-Ghantal brothers. They asked her to be their wife but she managed to escape. She reached Kanali Chhinna where Haruwa Kaira was working in his fields with his nine sons. They were charmed by her matchless beauty and wanted her to be their wife. She, however, managed to escape from them also. She reached Dwarahat where Pachuwa Doral tried to stop her but she managed to give him the slip. At last she reached Barahat. Malu Sahi was asleep in his palace. Rajula bribed the guard who kept a letter under his pillow telling him, "If your love be true come to take me from my village in Johar." She then proceeded to her parents. When Malu Sahi awoke, he decided to get Rajula at all costs. His mother insisted that she would get him seven maharanis and he could name the prettiest of them as Rajula. But Malu Sahi would have none of that and insisted on marrying Rajula. He became a *yogi* and started living on alms.

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At last he reached Rajula's village. She saw him and changing him into a flower, put him in her hair. Gangoli came to know of this and decided to poison Malu Sahi and invite Vikhay Pal to take Rajula away. The Rajmata at Barahat saw all this in a dream and came to know of the impending danger to Malu Sahi's life. She at once sent a huge army to settle the score with Gangoli. On the other side, Vikhay Pal also reached with a mighty force. In a fierce contest, Barahat won and Rajula and Malu Sahi at last met as man and wife.

There are a few local variations to this story but the basic theme is the same all over Uttarakhand. But for a few local exaggerated touches which all tales tend to be coloured with, the story is believed to have been based on actual happenings in the thirteenth century. In many temples, Rajula is worshipped along with the local deities.

The tale has many facets indicating the social life and beliefs of the people, their attitude to adult love, a belief in the power of the gods, the place of women in society and so on.

Some of the most fascinating folk tales of Uttarakhand are about the animal world highlighting the uplift of character qualities and destruction of vices. Once upon a time, a Brahmin had three daughters of great charm and beauty. He decided to find suitable husbands for them. He married one to a tiger, one to a bear but was greatly disappointed for the third, as he could only find a jackal for her. He started visiting them by turns. He went to the third daughter with a heavy heart but to his surprise, found her the happiest. The jackal was the most intelligent of his sons-in-law and managed to look after him and his daughter very well. He went to an oil seller's wife and surreptitiously bit her daughter. The child cried and the lady came to investigate. The jackal, taking advantage of her absence, brought oil for his father-in-law. Then he went to a shepherd and told him that his flock had entered a field where the farmers were beating them and abusing him. When the shepherd went away, the jackal pinched a goat and came home. Then he went to a water mill and blocked the water. The mill stopped. When the owner went to remove the blockade, the jackal ran away with a bag full of flour. This way, he managed to live well by his wit and also look after his father-in-law.

Once a fox and a vixen occupied the den of a tiger where the vixen delivered cubs. The tiger was out on his daily prowl. Seeing him return, the vixen panicked. The fox hatched a quick plan and both of them staged a dialogue.

Fox: (*in a commanding tone*) "Rani, why are children weeping?"

Vixen: "Darling, they want meat."

Fox: "Sweetheart, what sort of meat, goat's, cow's, elephant's or a bear's?"

Vixen: "No love, they want tiger's meat."

Fox: "Do not worry honey, that is why I have occupied the tiger's den.

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Let him come back!"

The tiger heard this and ran for his life. On the way, he was met by a monkey. On enquiring the cause of his fear, the tiger told the whole story. The monkey, who had seen the fox told the tiger about the true identity of the occupants. Following the persuasion from the monkey, both of them returned to investigate. Life for the fox family seemed finished. They, however, managed another trick.

Fox: "Darling, why are the children weeping?"

Vixen: (*in an irritated nagging tone*) "Haven't I told you that they want tiger's meat?"

Fox: "Sweetheart, don't worry, I had told the monkey, my servant, to bring a tiger and he must be on his way."

The tiger took to his heels again and the fox lived in peace ever after.

Another of the most popular animal tales is that of the mouse who had a grown up marriageable daughter. Such was her beauty and youthful charm that the mouse decided to marry her to the mightiest. So he went to the sun and offered his pretty daughter's hand in marriage. The sun said that he was constantly on the move and had no rest during day or night. Moreover, his spouse would not be able to bear his heat and brightness. Whereas marriage with such a pretty dame would be welcome to him, he was not the best choice for her. The sun asked him to go to the moon. The moon said that not only did he have black spots, but also the cloud was mightier than him and could cover him at will. The mouse then approached the cloud with the proposal. The cloud said, "Look at the wind. Any time he desires, he can sway me off my feet. Please go to him." The wind in turn said that when he met a rock, he just could not move him and in fact had to change his own course. The mouse then offered his pretty daughter to the rock. The rock said that he was only a part of the earth and proposed that the mouse should go to the earth. The mouse then went to the earth but he said that but for trees, the water would fully erode him. His safety depended on jungles. Wherever jungles are cut, he is in a bad shape. The mouse was obliged to go to the tree. The tree said that a mouse was mightier than him since he could eat up the roots and make him wither off. Reaching where he started, the mouse had to marry his fair daughter to a youth of his own community. Similar cyclic stories are famous all over the world. Hasn't this one got a resemblance to the famous song "Their is a hole in your bucket, dear Henry?"

There are also a great number of tales about birds. One is about the whistling thrushes. There lived in Janak Puri seven sisters who were always talking and never kept their mouths shut. During the marriage ceremony of Ram and Sita, they kept up a constant chatter with occasional giggles. So angry were the attending *devatas* that their curse changed them to birds who would constantly make noises. Since then the sisters became whistling thrushes. They always remain in company of each other and keep up a

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constant hullabaloo.

Then there is the story of a miser who was a money lender and used to charge exorbitant interest. So cruel was he that even the old and the weak were not spared by him. He amassed a vast fortune by deceipt and hid it underground. The gods became angry and sent devastating rains. Widespread landslides occurred. The ground where the miser had hidden his wealth moved. When the weather cleared the miser tried to dig out his hoard but in vain. He could not find it. He became mad with grief and kept on repeating *kakh lukaye kakh lukaye*—"Where have I hidden it? Where have I hidden it?" He became the kokals pheasant and to date keeps saying: "*Kakh lukaye, kakh lukaye*!"

There are many other folk tales which invariably depict the reward or punishment for good or bad deeds. They are far too numerous to find a fuller description in a travelogue. For our purposes the above accounts would suffice since it is intended to provide the travellers with a few typical tales affording insight into the minds of their hosts.

And now to the folk songs of Uttarakhand. As we proceed, you will realise that there is a wide variety before you; some sweet and brimming with all the gentler emotions of life, some melancholy and some expressing sheer joy of living. The imagery is as colourful as the alpine flowers of Uttarakhand. Pangs of separation from the beloved find expression in emotionally charged couplets. Amorous feelings are expressed with freedom and lack of restraint.

The first song deals with the budding love between the girl of the upper village and the boy of the lower village. It may be mentioned that in most of the villages bulk of the community have two dwellings, one in the higher zone, *mall gaon* as summer resort and one in the lower area, *tall gaon* as winter residence. The transliteration reads :

Boy — *Oh mall gaon ki chhori tu aija pas mera,*
Sara mulakh se rainde chha nakhra ajab tera.
Girl — *Oh tall gaon ka chhora tu aija pas mera.*
Sara mulakh se rainde chha nakhra ajab tera.
Oh aikuli palang meri legi raindi lag ma,
Batchit karan ko tu aye ja sath ma.
Boy — *Oh hurkayali danti teri raindi chh kamar ma,*
Ghas katanku tu aye jae sath ma.
Girl — *Oh sasur ji jae raind akelime dana ma,*
Sasu jee raindi meri akeli me sera ma.
Girl } — *Dhan katula sera oh sera tu ayeja pas mera,*
Boy } — *Sara mulakh se rainde chha nakhra ajab tera*

* * *

Boy — Oh fair dame from the upper village,
come to me, come to me.
you have peerless charm and beauty,

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come to me.

Girl — Oh boy of the lower village,
come to me, come to me,
Your personality and style
are the finest in the whole world.
I am alone at home,
My bed awaits thee, come to me,
I have something pleasant to tell thee,
come to me.

Boy — A beautiful sickle adorns your pretty waist,
come to me,
We will cut the grass together,
come to me.

Girl — My father-in-law has gone to the forest,
Mother-in-law has gone to the fields,
Alone at home I wait for thee,
come to me.

Together — Together we shall harvest paddy,
You are the prettiest girl in the whole world,
You are the handsomest boy in the whole world.

The second song is a duet sung by two sisters who are married to far off villages and have met at their parents' home after a long time. Whilst they express the intense joy of togetherness, there is an undercurrent of the fear of impending separation and also a hope of future meetings.

Hito didi hito bhuli hit ho bahna,
Ghas katan par ka dandan ma,
Pari ki masik didi pari ki masik
Mai bhulor bhuli jaula, tu bhular na seek
Hito didi...
Paguri ki lait bhuli, paguri ki lait,
Aaj ki jaya batik, kab holi bhait,
Hito didi...
Son ki janjeer bhuli son ki janjeera,
Teri meri bhait holi devi ka mandira,
Hito didi...
Hito didi, hito bhuli, hit ho bahna,
Ghas katan par ka dandan ma.

* * *

Let us go sister, let us go,
Beyond that hill for cutting grass.
Let us go together.
Beyond that hill sister,
Who knows what all goes on.
Even if I forget thee,

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You do not forget me.
Let us go sister, let us go together.
Behold sister, in the distance,
Comes a man with a beautiful turban.
He will take you away.
We shall part company today,
God knows when we meet again.
Let us go sister, let us go together.
You have a beautiful gold chain,
We shall meet again,
In the annual fair,
At Devi's temple.
Let us go sister, let us go together,
Beyond the hill for cutting grass.

The next song depicts the age-old insistence of the newly married girl for frequent visits to her parents' home. Her husband comes up with many excuses to persuade her to stay on. The heat enroute would be unbearable for her and in any case, won't his crops wither off without her!

Girl — Teri khuti meri salam main maite jande bhagi;
Hai teri khuti meri salam main maite jande bhagi;
Mai eju babu ke narayo, main maite jande bhagi.
Boy — Teri eju yan bulala tera babu yan bulala tu maite na ja bhagi,
Girl — Teri khuti meri salam main maite jande bhagi;
Main bhai ke naraya main baini ke naraya main maite jande bhagi.
Boy — Tero bhai yan bulala teri baini yan bulala tu maite na ja bhagi.
Girl — Teri khuti meri salam main maite jande bhagi.
Boy — Chomase dhungi chifli teri khuti rarhi jali,
Mero hiy sukhi jalo tu maite no ja bhagi.
Girl — Teri khuti meri salam main maite jande bhagi,
Hai teri khuti meri salam main maite jande bhagi.

* * *

Girl — I request thee, I implore thee,
Let me go to my parents' home.
I miss my mother, I pine for my father.
Let me go to my parent's place.
Boy — You call your mother here,
You invite your father here,
But don't go away.
Without you, how shall I stay?
Girl — I request thee, I beseech thee,
Let me go to my parents' house,
I miss my sister, I pine for my brother,
Let me go to my parents' place.

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Boy — You call your brother here,
You invite your sister here.
But don't go away,
Without you, how shall I stay?
Girl — Oh I request thee, I implore thee,
Let me go to my parents home.
Boy — Oh fair dame, how shall you bear,
The intense heat enroute.
Without you my fields,
Will wither off like me.
Don't, oh don't go away,
Without you, how shall I stay?

The next song is a group song and dance in which only boys take part. A young man with two wives goes to attend a fair, meets a beautiful girl named Lali, the daughter of *Pradhan* and proposes to her. He praises her beauty. He has two wives but still his life is full of mist like a jungle. He has three-storeyed house. She would sit in the veranda like a rani. His old mother would call her *nai bahu*. His village is in the jungle and he has a lot of land. She would only scare off the monkeys and do nothing else. "Oh beautiful daughter of the *Pradhan*, come with me."

Lali ho lali hosia padhani lali tilo dhara bola,
Dwimaniyan tali dhur lago dwimuara ghar,
Chhiya tisari tul noli.
Lali O...
Tapura mahal myare chhaji main roli buriya matari meri Nauli bwari kauli,
Lali O...
Dhura ko gon chha mero banar hakali dwi ana rakam meti tu kutu kamali.
Lali O Lali hosiya padhani lali tilo dhara bola.

The next song depicts the pangs of separation of a man away from home on military service. He imagines his beloved wife to be out cutting grass in the rain whilst their child weeps at home.

Tu ko chhai ghaseri pungra ka chhor man,
Ke ku ai tu ghas ku run jhuna barkha man.
Tu ko chhai ghaseri...
Sasu teri gali dind jhat ayce,
Dyar ma tyaro chhwato nun rund sasu ji ka god man.
Tu ko chhai ghaseri...
Math maili hwegya teri barkha lai mukhari eh bhalikai ruji gyana tera,
Angi ki khulari eh tu ko chhai ghaseri.

* * *

Oh pretty dame,
Is this the time for cutting grass?

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Why have you come out in rain.
Oh pretty dame,
In the lap of your mother-in-law
Your innocent baby cries.
Your mother-in-law is cursing you,
You have got drenched in the rain.
Oh pretty dame,
Why have you come at this time?
Go back.

The next one is a duet where the first line "*Hai, hai, supari khai*" is only for rhythm and like many other songs provides refrain. Courtship is on; with all its intense emotions and suggestive voluptuousness.

Boy — Hai, hai, hai, supari khai khai suna maya.
Kya sundar gham lagyon chha...
Girl — Nan manni maduwa bhari gyenmeni thul man
Boy — Tilmani ghuri ki ali mati kai si nan ni
Hai, hai hai...
Girl — Pura man si ki thandi hawa panchi baithi ghara,
Boy — Tilmani luki ki ali yo gulabi kol,
Hai, hai, hai...
Til na mero hona suwa tu hwega jogna.
Girl — Din par din barthi gayo yo tero jobana.
Boy — Tu meri Radhika holi main tero Mohana,
Hai, hai, hai, supari khai khai suna maya,
Kya sundargham lagon chha.

Boy — Oh dear one,
Bracing is the sun,
Come out with me.
Girl — Oh dear one!
I am busy in keeping the grain,
How can I come.
Boy — You are pretty as *tilmani*,
Oh dear one,
Bracing is the sun,
Come to me,
Girl — Cold winds are blowing,
Even the birds sit in the nests—
Won't I catch cold?
How can I come.
Boy — Transitory is the world,
Like this; Oh fair one,
You will become a nun!
Come out with me, come to me.

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Girl — You are handsome and irresistible.
Boy — You become my Radha and I your Mohan,
Come to me.

The next song depicts the intense love and reverence of the Uttarakhand *nivasis* for their beautiful land. It is generally sung as a chorus.

Ah, ha, ha, punya bhoomi, dev bhoomi,
Ah, ha, Kan bhali legadi matri bhoomi,
Unchi nichi dhandyon ka,
Nich kan suhan mulk mero,
Shivji ko Kailash yahan debtaon ka bas,
Ah, ha, ha, matri bhoomi, punya bhoomi...
Bhak bhak bugyal,
Dakh phoolon ki bahar,
Jeth asar bhali lagdi papi thandi bar.
Matri bhoomi, ah, ha, ha, punya bhoomi,
Chaal chhal digoli yakha,
Unchi chha bayar,
Swarg jaiso mulk mero Badri Kedar.
Ah, ha, punya bhoomi...

Ah, this *punya bhoomi*, this *dev bhoomi*,
So dear is my land to me, this *matri bhoomi.*
High are the mountains,
Low are the hills,
Shivji resides here,
Devtas live in this *punya bhoomi...*

High are the beautiful meadows,
Pretty are the flowers
Cool breeze blows during summer,
Ah this my beloved land, *matri bhoomi...*

This my land;
is better than heaven.
Holy Badrinath and Kedarnath are here,
Ah this my beloved land, this *punya bhoomi*

Next to the songs must come the dances. Dancing in Uttarakhand has always been held high as a celestial occupation associated with Shiva, king of mountains, and *apasras* of Indra, the ruler of heaven. The *Hurkiyas* have preserved most of the traditions in this respect. Most of the group dances are performed in a circle with sticks or hand claps giving the beat.

The *jagar* is the most important folk dance and is performed for propitiating the local deities and even *bhoot-pret*. More than a dance, it is a

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ritual and was at one time the exclusive preserve of *devadasis*. A fire is lit in the centre around which young girls dance, occasionally joined by boys. The entire gathering provides the heat by clapping.

The *chholiya* is an exclusive dance of the boys performed at the head of a marriage procession. The dance commemorates the old practice of forcible carriage of the bride. A few boys dress up like soliders of the yesteryears and enact scenes of fierce duels before and after the carriage of the girl by her lover.

The *jhawra* is a group dance for as many boys, girls, men and women as are willing to take part and the ground can hold. Holding each other's arms or waists, the party moves in a circle. Musicians remain in the centre.

The *chapeli* is the only dance performed by a girl and a boy and normally only the *Hurkiyas* perform it at the village fairs.

The folk dances of the Bhotias are *dandala*, *chamfuli dhusaka* and *dhurang*. They are all group dances and very much resemble the *garba* dance of Gujarat. Bhotias dance mainly for recreation without any religious overtones.

Of the fine arts, the foremost is *alpana*, or floor painting. On festive occasions, like marriage, child-birth and religious or national days, floors are first smeared with coloured clay, mainly *geru* and then designs made with paste of flour and ground bark of some trees. The walls are decorated with dots (*boond*) of different colours. This form is called *bar-boond* and is considered an essential accomplishment of the young marriageable girls.

In addition, on the religious days, the images of gods and goddesses are drawn on walls. The art is named *jyonti* or *dikara*. These names are also associated with making of clay models of the gods and goddesses on festive occasions. The images of the goddess Nanda are carved from a banana trunk with various other plants forming the limbs.

There is also a school of painting called the Garhwal School which appears to be a hybrid of the Kangra and the Moghul schools. Its main exponent was one Mola Ram (1743-1833). It is believed by some scholars that some painters from Kangra migrated to Garhwal in 1831, while others vehemently contest this view.

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The Approaches to the Valley

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9

Pravesh—1

Dehra Dun—Mussoori—Kalsi—Chakrata

THERE ARE a number of points of entry into our coveted Valley of Gods and depending on the place of start, the reader may select his own point of *pravesh*. We shall describe all major routes and by choice we shall choose the western-most point which on the map will look to be the extreme left. Our aim here will be to reach some places of reasonable interest or prominence and then stay on. The journey onward would be described in the later chapters, depending on our destination.

Dehra Dun, our western-most entry point lies in some of the most beautiful surroundings between the Shivaliks and the Nag Tibba Ranges with the Ganga and Yamuna on either side. The valley is 35 kilometres by 23 kilometres and varies in altitude from 660 metres to 900 metres.

People starting from Punjab and other western areas may reach Saharanpur and then reach Dehra Dun, by road or rail. The road journey is quicker and passes through the picturesque Shivaliks, which are crossed by the Mohan pass. On the way we pass through the Rajaji Wild Life Sanctuary. There was a time when the denizens of the wilds; tigers, panthers, sloth bears, barking deer, hogs and many others roamed here in large numbers. The times have, however, changed and now the jackal is the only animal seen in reasonable numbers. Anyway, there is a hope that as the controls are clamped with severity, the animals might still have a chance to survive. The Shivaliks have many flowering trees mainly rhododendron and jacaranda which blossom during April-May. Crossing the Mohan pass, we see the vast expanses of the Doon. The most striking thing about the valley is its greenery.

From Delhi onwards the journey may be continued by train passing through Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Roorkee and on to Dehra Dun via Haridwar. The last mentioned place will form another entry point and will figure later in detail. The road journey from Delhi, however, offers greater attractions. If you are observant, the milestones disclose the distance to Niti which is over five hundred miles. Niti is a pass in the valley of the Dhauli

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Ganga, a tributary of the Alaknanda. There is no road up to Niti. How have these milestones come to be? Was the Hindustan-Tibet road once planned through Niti? I have tried to check through various sources but no one has given me any satisfactory answer.

The city of Meerut revives memories of the First War of Independence. It was here that soldiers rose in rebellion to rid the country of foreign oppressors. We pass through lush agriculture country with vast fields of wheat, paddy and sugarcane studded with many mango groves. One wonders how a land like this can have any food problem! Is the pressure of population too much? Will the answer ultimately lie in making family planning compulsory? Sooner the better.

At Roorkee, the traveller may choose to proceed by the Mohan pass where Temur's army once fought with the forces of Raja Bahruz, or via Haridwar and Rishikesh. The latter route goes along the Ganga Canal for the first few kilometres. After Haridwar, it passes through the jungles of Dehra Dun. The scenery is magnificent and soothing to one's eyes.

Dehra Dun is our first place of halt and deserves description in detail. Situated at an altitude of about 750 metres, the town is blessed with a salubrious climate throughout the year. The city owes its name to the dissident Sikh Guru Baba Ram Rai whose claims to be the eighth or ninth guru were rejected by majority of the Sikh community. Shri Guru Har Rai, the seventh guru, passed away in 1661 leaving two sons, Ram Rai, fifteen and Har Kishan, six. Since Ram Rai was the son of a *dasi*, his claims to the *gaddi* were rejected. He kept agitating during the time of Shri Guru Har Kishan and Shri Guru Teg Bahadur and tried for the support of Aurangzeb. In fact, at the time of the martyrdom of Shri Guru Teg Bahadur, Ram Rai was at the court of the emperor and some believe that he played a predominant role in the event! Aurangzeb had, however, decided against incurring the wrath of the Sikh community and did not support the claim of Ram Rai. He instead ordered Raja Pirthi Shah of Garhwal to accommodate him. The raja made endownment of some villages in the valley to the *mahant*. Baba Ram Rai established his *dera* at village Khurbura and had the temple constructed in Dhamuwala. The *dera* of the Guru grew into the town of Dehra Dun, literally meaning the residence in the valley.

The village of Khurbura has its own legend. After losing everything in the gambling bout with Duryodhan and ordered *banavas*, the Pandavas came to Doon to hide during the last year of their exile. They were employed by Raja Virat. The Kauravas got wind of their hiding place and threatened Virat either to disclose the whereabouts of the Pandavas or fight. Virat declined. A fierce contest of arms took place. The Pandavas had by now completed the term of exile and came out openly to help the raja. During the fight a cow came on to the battlefield whose hoof got injured. The battlefield acquired the name of Khurkata literally meaning 'hoof cut'. With passage of time, it came to be called Khurbura.

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Tracing the history of the valley from the very ancient times, there is evidence that Doon was once a huge lake presumably carved out of the diminishing Sea of Tethys. As the mountains rose, vast quantity of water was trapped and a huge lake formed in the area. Some of the fossil remains of aquatic animals have been found in the valley. The legends current in villages have their own explanations for the formation of these fossil remains. It is believed that the valley witnessed a war between gods and demons. The gods tricked the demons by getting them drunk and killed all. Their dead bodies littered the whole area and the valley was deserted by all except Shiva who roamed the hills wearing a necklace of skulls. The entire area came to be called as *Shiva-lok*, the abode of Shiva. Shivalik is derived from *Shiva-lok*.

The early history of human habitations in the region is shrouded in mystery. Doon was uninhabited during the visit of Huen Tsang in the seventh century a.d. There are, however, signs of affluent Aryan settlements in the pre-Christ centuries. One of the Ashoka pillar edicts dating back to the third century b.c. exists at Kalsi. Since these edicts were constructed only at thickly populated places, the valley must have witnessed affluence before relapsing into oblivion. Also, it is not possible to ascertain the reasons of desertion of the valley. Some nomadic tribes, mainly the *Gujars* and the *Banjaras* colonised the valley from time to time till the advent of Baba Ram Rai during the eighteenth century.

The sovereignty of Pirthi Shah over Doon was recognized by Aurangzeb due to interesting historical events. Suleman Shikoh, the son of Dara Shikoh took refuge in these hills with Raja Pirthi Shah of Garhwal. The story goes that one day he got drunk and tried to get fresh with the *rani*. Pirthi was enranged and handed him over to Aurangzeb. What happened to him can well be imagined and is none of our concern except that Aurangzeb recognized the sovereignty of the Raja of Garhwal over the hills including Doon. At the decline of Mughal power, Rohillas took possession of the area around Saharanpur. Doon was attacked by Najib-ud-Daulah, the Rohilla chief, and annexed to Saharanpur in 1757. The valley, however, slipped out of the hands of the Rohillas after the death of Najib-ud-Daulah in 1770 and witnessed an era of lawlessness, changing hands between the Sikhs, Marathas and Gorkhas and becoming a virtual haven for the dacoits and ruffians.

The Rohillas attacked Doon again in 1786 under the leadership of Ghulam Kader who left a trail of blood and plunder. He died without consolidating the gains, and the valley changed hands between Raja of Sirmoor, and the Marathas and fell into the hands of the Garhwal Rajas of Srinagar. Since these rulers were quite incompetent the valley was in a virtual state of anarchy. The Gorkhas captured Garhwal from Sudershan Shah who fled to Bareilly where he met an Anglo-Indian Officer, Captain Hyder Jung Hearsy. On 22nd of June 1811, Sudershan Shah sold the valley to Captain Jung (also written Young in some accounts) for three thousand

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and five rupees. The enterprising officer rented it to East India Company for six hundred rupees a year. This agreement was to be operative for many generations of the heirs of Captain Hyder. The joy of this officer was however, short-lived and the East India Company staged a *volte-face* in 1814.

The British defeated the Gorkhas in 1815. The decisive battle in the war between the Gorkhas and East India Company was fought at Kalanga Hill on the banks of the river Raspana in the Doon valley. A unique twin monument—perhaps the only one of its kind in the world—commemorating the bravery of the victors as well as vanquished now stands there. The monument was put up by the British Government. It comprises two small pyramids on a common base; one in honour of the British soldiers and the other in memory of Balbahadur Singh Thapa and his gallant Gorkhas.

The British reinstated Sudershan Shah at Srinagar. The valley was however, retained by them. Vigorous colonization started after 1815. Colonel Everest, famous because of Mount Everest, established the Survey of India Offices at Dehra Dun in 1830. The offices are still in Dehra Dun. Tea plantation was started at Kaulagarh by the Government under the management of Dr. Jameson, Superintendent of Botanical Garden Saharnpur in 1840. In 1860, the ex-*Emir* of Afghanistan, Yakub Khan was brought to the valley and had his winter residence in Dehra Dun.

The Indian Military Academy and the Forest Research Institute came up in the suburbs of Dehra Dun. The railway line reached the town in 1901. The Prince of Wales Military College, Doon School and a number of other premier educational institutes came up. A motor road was constructed up to Mussoori in 1930. In 1936, an Italian, Father Clement, formed a co-operative society. The area of their settlement came to be known as Clement Town.

Of the places of travellers' interest in Dehra Dun, the Forest Research Institute figures first. The Institute functions under the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. It is the only one of its type in whole of Asia and one of the best in the world. Situated at about six kilometers from Dehra Dun on Chakrata road, a visit there will amply repay the labour.

The first forest school was set up at Dehra Dun, in 1878. Through a series of reorganizations and movements to better locations including the present site of Doon School, the institute was shifted to its present location in 1925. The institute earned the recognition of United Nations in 1951. The present imposing building, one of the biggest in the whole of India came up in 1929. This two-storeyed structure is 228 metres long and covers an area of 2.8 hectares. The F.R.I. has some of the greenest lawns and avenues of majestic trees. The place which one must see is the museum and the reader would find his visit worth the trouble. An item of unique beauty is the cross section of a *deodar* tree that lived more than seven hundred years from the thirteenth century to the twentieth century. It contains a list of

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important historical events witnessed by the tree: the establishment of Qutab Minar in Delhi in 1215; the coronation of Razia Sultana in 1236; the enthronement of Sultan Allauddin Khilji in 1296; the reign of Mohammad Tuglaq in 1325; the invasion of Temur with all his pyramids of human skulls in 1398; the birth of Shri Guru Nanak Dev in 1469; the arrival of Vascoda Gama in 1498; the battle of Panipat and start of the Mughal era in 1526; the coronation of Akbar in 1556; the establishment of the East India Company in 1600; the construction of Taj Mahal in 1632; the exploits of Chhatrapati Shivaji in 1674; the battle of Plassey in 1757; the First War of Independence and the end of the Mughal dynasty in 1857; the establishment of Indian National Congress in 1885; and First World War in 1914. The tree witnessed many proud dynasties and their "kings like chimney sweepers, come to dust." Where is Temur now; that architect of the pyramids of human skulls ? Where are his own remains ?

I have some other pleasant associations with F. R. I. and for pleasure I should share one with you. The F.R.I. estate extends right up to the Indian Military Academy. During their games period, the cadets frequently stroll up to or run in the estate. During our stay at the I.M.A. there were some pretty girls staying in a bungalow in the F.R.I. We decided to get an introduction somehow. A plan was made in great detail. It involved our going for a run and after running hard for about ten miles, reaching the objective—the bungalow of the girls. Here, one cadet would feign exhaustion and cry 'water, water'. In this forced emergency we would at once take him to the bungalow and request help with obvious developments. The plan was rehearsed on the ground except for the final scene which was rehearsed and re-rehearsed on the lines. The D Day was fixed on one Friday evening, considered to be an auspicious day just because one Friday in the year is called Good Friday! Moreover, a study of the pattern of 'enemy behaviour' had revealed that the young ladies were never out on Fridays; the days of absence generally being Saturdays and Sundays. The day arrived and after due prayers, the plan was put into action. That day we ran with real gusto, sweated profusely and were all at the verge of exhaustion. At last the objective came near and we formed up for the final show. Panting heavily, we reached the bungalow. The last act of the play was put in operation and shouting 'water, water' we took our casualty in the bungalow! It was locked ! The summer vacation had started a day before! Love's labour lost!

The botanical gardens of the F.R.I. Estate have barricaded enclosures for animals like *cheetal*, stag, *ghoral* and the like that add to the attractions for the visitor.

Another place of tourist interest near Dehra Dun is Sahasradhara or 'the thousand springs'. The waterfall at Sahasradhara is about ten metres wide. The water has a very high lime content. There is a cave nearby with an autogenous Shiva *linga*.

And now before we proceed on to Mussoori, it may be pointed out that

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the best *leechi* season is just before the Monsoon. Also, do not forget to buy some *basmati* rice. From Dehra Dun we may proceed to Mussoori, Kalsi or Chakrata and then move on to our selected place of visit in the Valley of Gods.

Mussoori, the 'Queen of Hills', offers some of the grandest views in the Himalayas. The hills in Mussoori rise right in front of Doon valley in the form of a huge horse shoe which gradually ascends in the centre. At night, the lights of Mussoori shine invitingly down on Dehra Dun. Resembling the arc of the milky way, they offer a pretty sight.

The road to Mussoori passes through Rajpur which is at a distance of about 12 kilometres from Dehra Dun. The road is lined with posh bungalows of the elite of Doon and retired officials including the prominent political figure, Mrs. Vijaya Laxmi Pandit. Rajpur is a small town nestling at the very feet of the sub-Himalayas. It bears a deserted look but has had its hey-day. Prior to the construction of the direct road to Mussoori in 1930, this place served as a base for a trek to Mussoori and had some imposing hotels, catering to the tastes and needs of travellers, trekkers, hikers and hunters. Some of the hotels had imposing names as the 'Prince of Wales' and 'Agency'. Such are the vagaries of the times. If you so choose, you can still trek from Rajpur to Mussoori taking about two to three hours. On the way, as you look down, you get a panoramic view of the valley right up to Rishikesh with fleeting glimpses of the river Ganga. The road journey takes a little less than an hour.

Mussoori owes its existence to two trekkers, Capt. Young and Mr. F.J. Shore who visited it in 1823 for shooting. A beautiful view of the snow peaks and the bracing climate laid such a spell on them that they decided to build a shooting box at 'Camel's Back'. They vociferously canvassed the establishment of a township here. Doctors selected the site for a sanatorium which was constructed in 1826. The convalescent depot for the British soldiers was opened at Landour in 1827. The first shop by an Englishman was constructed by one Mr. Lawrence in 1829. In 1832, a branch of the Survey of India office was opened by Col. George Richard Everest. Thus the place picked up qualities necessary to become a premier hill station of north-western India. In 1860, the Afghan detenu Yakub Khan was brought here and 'Bellevue Estate' was purchased for his summer residence. In 1884, Mussoori hosted the Duke and Duchess of Connaught who have given their name to famous Connaught Place in Delhi. Electric lines were laid in 1909 giving a further boost to the pace of development. The construction of the motor road in 1930 provided the last ingredient for affluence.

The town is situated at an altitudc of 2,005 metres and has a sufficient number of good hotels to cater to the needs of all tastes and pockets. Some of the bungalows have apricot, pear and apple trees. Of flowers, there is a profusion and variety of the greatest number. Jungles around still abound in

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barking deer, pheasants and patridges and you may try your luck. It is, however, better and more in keeping with the times to shoot with the camera. One of the finest views of the snow peaks is obtained from Gun Hill and Lal Tibba. On a clear day, you may see Bander Poonchh, Kedarnath, Shri Kantha, Chaukhamba and the distant Nanda Devi forming the idyllic background to the stretch of misty hills. The best time to visit Mussoori is the middle of April when the hills around Mussoori are clothed in miniature daisies. The blue iris also grows abundantly. The oak and pine forests with a sweet lingering fragrance impart a feeling of exhilaration by their looks of peace and tranquillity. Here and there you come across the *langurs* violently shaking the trees to warn other groups that a hungry family is on the move. To the south is the finest panorama of Doon with rich and varied verdure. Beyond the Shivaliks, the plains of Doab offer an excellent view with no limits except the range of vision. Some of the places of tourist interest in and around Mussoori are Benog Hill with an observatory open to the public, waterfalls of Bhatta, Kempty and Mossey at distances of 16, 13 and I6 kilometres respectively, Depot Hill and Gun Hill which offer fine views and the Municipal Garden for the 'not so adventurous'. Mussoori suffered a setback after 1947. The establishment of the Army School of Work Studies, and the Shastri Institute of Administration for the training of Indian Administrative and Foreign Services at Mussoori have given the hill station a necessary boost.

Mussoori offers some fine treks into the interior of the Himalayas and one can reach Chakrata, Simla, Uttarkashy, Tehri and Narendra Nagar through charming landscape. On the road to Chamba-Tehri, we follow a high ridge with excellent views at Dhamlte, 24 kilometres and Surkhanda Devi, 32 kilometres. Or you may move into the splendid forests of *deodar* and oak with splashes of brilliant scarlets of the rhododendron and just listen to the silence.

Another point of entry into our coveted land is Kalsi, famous for its Ashoka edict and some other items of archaeological interest. Kalsi, also called Kalkot in ancient literature, was at one time an important seat of Aryan culture. It is possible that the valley of river Yamuna where Kalsi lies served as one of the major routes of entry into the holy Uttarakhand and beyond into Tibet. Since the major route to Kedarnath and Badrinath passed through Kalsi, the place must have served as a base and could have been a prominent city. The ascent of Buddhism and resultant neglect of Hindu shrines from the third century b.c. to the eighth century a.d. might have led to its downfall in an irrepairable manner. The new road from Kalsi to Barkot, Yamunotri and Uttarkashy is the shortest approach to the western regions of Uttarakhand and might enhance the importance of Kalsi to some extent.

Kalsi is otherwise located in a picturesque place at the foot of the hills and commands a fine panoramic view of Doon. There are large mango

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groves around the approach road that lend added charm to the scenery. The village is located on the Amlawa nullah which is a tributary of the Yamuna. The Ashoka edict lies near the small villages of Vyas and Haripur which might have at one time been suburbs of Kalsi. It consists of a huge stone about three metres each in length and height and about two and a half metres in breadth, tapering to the top. To the right is the inlaid trace of an elephant with 'गजात्मा' (*gajatma*) written between the legs. It was discovered by Mr. Forrest in 1860. The inscription was barely visible at the time of discovery but the clearance of moss and cleaning brought out a marble white surface with a clear inscription better than those on other Ashoka stones. It is possible that as the number of pilgrims and traders declined, the edict was forgotten and gathered moss. This might well have protected it from corrosion by weather. The presence of the stone was, however, always known to the locals who called it *Chitrashila*, or the picture stone. A dome was constructed over the stone in 1912 to protect this priceless find from erosion.

Kalsi is believed to have been the capital of Raja Virat who has figured above. In 1953, excavations unearthed the paraphernalia of an '*Ashvamedha Yajna*', the famous horse sacrifice of Aryan sovereigns. Haripur is also connected with the name of Raja Risalu. There is in fact a small mound nearby which is named '*Raja Risalu ki Tibri*' Raja Risalu is a legendary figure and I have clear memories of hearing of his great exploits from one Saeen Dina, a Muslim mendicant of my village Bhopawala in Sialkot district. Saeen Dina used to look after the tomb of a *pir* believed to have been 27 feet tall. He lived on alms and made no distinction between Hindus and Muslims. As children, we would keenly await the turn of our street for the visit of Saeen Dina and listen to the stories and exploits of Raja Risalu. Standing near this *Tibri*; I have suffered untold pangs for my childhood friends; Mohammed Sadiq, Stephen Masih, Bhai Nangni, a sikh child turned Nihang Singh. Where are they? What has man gained from partition? To what use has man put his religion?

Over and above the main routes of entry as described above, there are also a number of tracks through Chakrata Tehsil or Jaunsar Bawar as it is traditionally called. The Dehra Dun district includes the area of Jaunsar Bawar, the meeting place of Shivaliks and Nag Tibba Ranges which stretch about 50 kilometres along the western region of Uttarakhand between rivers Yamuna and Tons. The central range called Pokri rises upto 2,565 metres above the sea level. It is lush green country with numerous small nullahs and rivulets. The beautiful glaciated valley 'Har-ki-Doon' lies in Jaunsar Bawar. There are vantage points affording charming glimpses of Bander Poonchh and Dhaula Dhar in Himachal.

Chakrata is situated at the most salubrious height of 2,294 metres. The town is located on two twin spurs called Chakrata and Kailana and is surrounded by snow peaks on three sides. Consruction of cantonment was

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undertaken in 1866 and the first troops were led by Col. R. Hume. The town owes a lot to the Colonel for it is he who put it in shape and on the map. The peak of Devaban nearby is magnificent. The town, located at a distance of 91 kilometres by road from Dehra Dun, is connected with Simla and Mussoori by tracks which will be replaced by road in due course. Many roads are under construction.

The people of Jaunsar Bawar are very cheerful and hospitable. The women are invitingly beautiful and live a free and full life. Sometimes they work bare-bosomed in the fields revealing curvaceous figures. I have vivid memories of such scenes of rare display of gay abandon dating back to my cadet days when we roamed these hills on traning and hiking excursions. Community dances are common and performed at the slightest excuses. It is a pleasure seeing the young and old perform in their festive best. Polyandry and polygamy are both practised. Marriage is, however, a matter of convenience and divorces are common and easy. A peculiarity of the area is that the Kaurvas are worshipped here. It is believed that some followers of Duryodhan took refuge in these hills after their defeat at Lohaghat. The fugitives first settled at Kurva. Since then, Duryodhan is worshipped as a god and the Pandavas dreaded as demons! There are a number of shrines dedicated to the Kaurvas. The main temple Hansi is, however, dedicated to Mahasu, an incarnation of Vishnu.

From Jaunsur Bawar, numerous tracks lead us on through high and low passes into the valley of Yamuna. Travellers out for fun and enjoyable trekking may pass through this area and get into the valley of Yamuna where motor roads are met for onward journeys.

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10

Pravesh—2

Hardwar—Rishikesh

OUR NEXT point of entry is via Hardwar-Rishikesh. In a train journey from Hardwar to Dehra Dun, Rishikesh is by-passed to the left with a line starting from the Raiwala junction. On a journey by road between Hardwar and Dehra Dun, Rishikesh is on the way. Roorkee, from where the road for Hardwar bifurcates, is famous for one of the oldest engineering college founded in 1847; 10 years before the First War of Independence. The road from Roorkee to Hardwar moves along the canal. As we near the hills, the weather cools perceptibly. The fields become greener and soothing to one's eyes.

Dronacharya, the *guru* of the Pandava princes, was born at Hardwar. It was at Hardwar that Arjuna met and wed Uluppi, the daughter of Nag Raja Vasuki. Hardwar has many ancient names and all of them have either mythological legends attached to them or are associated with sages. Some of the common ones are Gangadwara, Mayapuri, Gupila or Kapila, Mokshdwara, Har-dwar and Hari-dwar. Muslim historians have generally used the name Gangadwara. In the Van-Parva of *Mahabharata*, Rishi Lomasa tells Yudhishthira, "Lord Shiva broke the fall of Ganga by letting her descend on his locks at Gangadwara." Gupila and Kapila are named after the *muni* who underwent penances and austerities at Kapil Sthana. The Shaivites call the town Har-dwara, or a gateway to the dwellings of Har, which is one of the names of Shiva. Hari being a name of Vishnu, the Vaishnavites call the town Haridwar. The *Skand Purana* and the *Padma Purana* have vivid accounts of the holiness of Hardwar. A European traveller, Tom Coryat, who visited India during the reign of Jehangir mixed both and called the city 'Hardwar—The Capital of Shiva'. We shall use both names, Haridwar as well as Hardwar at will.

The Chinese traveller Huen Tsang has referred to this town as Mo-Yo-Lo which is probably the same as Mayapura, a southern suburb of Hardwar. He said, "The pure streams of the river flow around Mo-Yu-Lo on every side. It produces copper, pure crystal and precious vases. There are

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always hundreds and thousands of people who come here to have a bath in the holy river." He must be referring to the *kumbha mela*,held after every 12 years. Apart from providing a religious gathering, the *mela* provides an occasion for vigorous business activity. A.R. Raper who visited Hardwar at the close of nineteenth century records that a great many items of all kinds, like horses, mules, dry fruits of Kabul and Kandhar and the rock salt, were sold at the *kumbha*.

The most popular bathing ghat at Hardwar is Hari-ki-Pauri or Har-ki-Pairi, meaning the stepping stone to Vishnu or the holy feet of Shiva. It is here that *amrit* had fallen from the *kumbha* being carried by Jayanta. According to another legend Raja Shivet worshipped the gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh all of whom appeared in person here imparting sanctity to the *ghat*. The imprints of the gods' feet are still visible on a stone in the wall and hence the name, Hari-ki-Pauri. The *ghat* itself is called Brahama Kund.

In the close vicinity of Hari-ki-Pauri is the Gangadwara temple which is normally visited immediately after a bath. Of temples, of course, there is no dearth and each one has its own history. There are five main places for bathing and worship, Hari-ki-Pauri, Kushavarta, Bilwa, Nil Parvat and Kankhal. The word 'Kankhal' poses a question, who is that *khala* or sinner who does not attain *mukti* here?

Kankhal is famous for the *yajna* of Daksha Prajapti and some times called Dakshasthana. It is said Daksha had 60 daughters. One of them, named Kali or Uma was married to Shiva. Daksha performed a *yajna* in which he did not invite Shiva due to a misunderstanding. The depressed Uma decided to go alone and complain to her mother. Shiva sent Vir Bhadra to attend on her. Seeing her husband insulted, Uma threw herself into the *yajna* fire and became *sati*. On learning this Shiva's third eye started emitting fire. He reached the venue of Daksha's *yajna* and cut off his head with his *trishul*. He then took the charred body of Uma and roamed through the whole of *srishti*. His third eye kept emiting fire as fierce as of 12 suns. Brahma saw this and wanted to save the world from total destruction. He requested Vishnu who started cutting off the limbs of the *sati* with his *Sudarshan Chakra* As the limbs kept falling, Shiva's rage turned into resignation and he at last reached Jageshwar for *tapasya*.

The limbs of Uma fell at different places. Accounts differ. The commonest belief is that the hair fell in Bengal, head in Tamil Nadu, face in Kashmir, breasts in Punjab and the *yoni* in Assam. It could be one or the main reason why area around Gauhati is called *Kamrup Desh*. Another legend gives a different reason for the *sati* burning herself. Shiva once bowed to Ram in the presence of Uma. On her query, Shiva told her that Ram was an incarnation of Vishnu whom Shiva also held in esteem. One day Uma transformed herself as Sita out of sport. After this incident Shiva star-

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ted seeing the form of Sita in Uma and grew cold towards her. She went to her father's place where also she felt unwelcome and immolated herself. She was later reborn as Parvati, the daughter of Himalaya. The place where Uma became *sati* is called Sati Kund.

The Bhim Goda, Bhim Gada or Bhim Ghora tank at Hardwar has its own legend. During the last journey of the Pandavas to the Himalayas, Dropadi felt thirsty. Bhim struck the earth with his *goda* (knee) or *gada* (Bhim's mace) creating a tank which came to be called Bhim Goda or Bhim Gada. A different version has that Bhim was asked to guide the Ganga. He was proceeding ahead of the river when his horse got scared by the turbulence of the river and kicked around in panic. His hoof hit the place where a tank was created and came to be called Bhim Ghora.

Another place worth visiting is the Sapta Rishi Ashram. The seven wise sages to whom the wisdom of the *Vedas* was revealed came to Hardwar for *tapasya*. The Ganga wanted to see all of them sitting in *samadhi*. She divided herself in seven channels, one passing near the hermitage of each. The best view of these channels is obtained from the Bhim Goda tank. This zone is called the Sapta Rishi Ganga.

Some of the other places of tourist interest are Rama Krishna Mission, Parmarth Ashram, Gurukul Kangri University, Guru Gorakh Nath temple, Sri Ayappa temple, Pashupati Mahadeva, Hanuman Mandir, Neeleshwar temple, Villwakeshwar temple, Bholagiri caves, Kali Devi and Anjani Devi.

An evening at Hardwar is an affair to remember. The tinkling of the temple bells fills the atmosphere with music. The chanting of *bhajans* tells the story of enduring faith of the multitudes since the very dawn of history. The devotees put small earthen lamps into tiny paper boats and float them on the river. The reflection of these myriad lights lends a heavenly charm to the river.

From Hardwar, we proceed to Rishikesh. the ancient name of which is Tapo Bhoomi. It is situated at a distance of 24 kilometres on the road from Hardwar to Dehra Dun. Numerous well-known *ashrams* can be seen all along the road. There are a number of places of religious and tourist interest at Rishikesh. The famous temple of Bharat, where he meditated and offered prayers for the well-being of Ram, was constructed by Shri Guru Shankaracharya. The Gita Bhavan deserves a visit. It was constructed by the Gita Press of Gorakhpur on the left bank of the Ganga. The building with lush green hills on one side and the whispering waters of the Ganga on the other has a picturesque setting. Lakshman Jhoola, a suspension bridge with a span of 140 metres, was constructed in 1939. The beauty of the idyllic setting of Lakshman Jhoola is, however, spoiled by a host of leperous beggars. Lakshman did *tapasya* for many years to rid himself of the sin of killing Meghanad in the battle with Ravan. His temple is located near Lakshman Jhoola.

A bath at the Triveni Ghat, the confluence of the Ganga, the Gupta

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Yamuna and the Gupta Saraswati has special merits. As is well known, this is not the only Triveni. We have one world famous Triveni of the Yamuna, the Ganga and the subterranean Saraswati at Prayag. Even in South India, at Kooduturai is the confluence of the Bhavani, the Cauvery, and the third river Amudha Nadi, which is subterranean. Are these mere myths or memories of old rivers that have disappeared like the Indo-Braham? A bath is also recommended at the Rishi Kund where Shri Ram bathed before proceeding on for *banavas*. Some of the other places of interest are Swarg Ashram for which free ferry is available, Shatrughan temple built in honour of the youngest brother of Ram, Pushkar temple, the Academy of Transcendental Meditation of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and many *Ashrams* like Kailash and Sivanand Ashram. There are number of tourist *dharamsalas*. The Tourism Department of the Government of India runs an excellent tourist lodge. Hippies visit Hardwar and Rishikesh in great numbers. The ingenuity of a Sikh businessman who has put up a board 'Food for Freaks', is indeed praiseworthy. The sale and consumption of meat and eggs, however, have been banned in Rishikesh by Government order. The Kali Kamli *dharamsala* is performing a great service to the *yatris* and tourists. They provide shelter for the night, take care of extra luggage and act as bankers. We shall see a number of these *dharamsalas* all over Uttarakhand. And one thing may be clarified here once for all. Uttarakhand *nivasis* have played the host for centuries and they know how to do it.

Rishikesh is truly a centre of communications. To the left, a road bifurcates taking us to Narendra Nagar, Tehri, Yamunotri, Uttarkashy and Gangotri. Straight down, on the right bank of the Ganga, is the road taking us to Kedarnath and Badrinath whereas the track along the left bank has same destination. Rishikesh is also connected with Dehra Dun and thereby Mussoori. In fact Mussoori could also be reached via Narendra Nagar and Chamba on the road to Tehri.

From Rishikesh, we move along the right bank of Ganga up to Dev Prayag, the confluence of Alaknanda and Bhagirathi. It may be mentioned here that whereas traditionally the Ganga starts from the confluence at Dev Prayag, some believe that it starts flowing from Lakshman Jhoola at Rishikesh. Dev Prayag is the first major confluence along this route. In sanctity, it comes next only to Triveni Sangam at Prayag. Most of the *pandas* of Badrinath live here during winter. Dev Prayag has a number of small temples, the main ones being Raghunath temple and Devi temple. The former is dedicated to Shri Ram, an incarnation of Vishnu. Puja is conducted by Telugu-speaking priests who migrated centuries back. The Devi temple has a huge bell which is heard from great distances.

From Dev Prayag we can turn left and reach Tehri on our way to Uttarkashy and Gangotri. The foot track will be converted into a road in years to come. Alternatively we may move on to reach Srinagar lying at a distance of only about 32 kilometres. Four kilometres short of Srinagar, a road

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moves left taking us to Tehri. Passing through the road-hugging town of Kirtinagar, we reach the vast plain where Srinagar is situated.

It is believed that Srinagar was established by Shri Shankaracharya. The legend goes that there was a man-eating rock at Srinagar called Sri-yantra. Shri Guru Shankaracharya threw it in the river. The very name, 'Shri Nagar' the dwelling place of god, conveys the immense sanctity of the town. Tradition has that the Alaknanda writes 'Om' ॐ near Srinagar. I have had the privilege of having flown over Srinagar a number of times and confirm the belief. Alaknanda does flow in the zig-zag fashion and if the waters of one of her southern tributaries are taken into account, it does make the form of ॐ

Srinagar is famous for the Kamaleshwar Mahadev temple. After the war with Ravan, Ram, paid a visit to Uttarakhand to pray for those killed in battle. At Srinagar, he used to worship Shiva with a thousand lotus flowers every day. Shiva decided to test his devotion and one day made one lotus disappear. Ram was determined to keep his vow and decided to pluck one of his eyes to make the offering. At this Shiva appeared in person to bless Ram and stopped him from this supreme sacrifice. Shri Ram came to be called K*amalanayana* or the Lotus-eyed.

Srinagar is a town of historic importance. In the sixteenth century, Maharaja Ajaypal established his capital at Srinagar. There is an interesting story about the foundation of the new capital city. Ajaypal once witnessed a hare hunting a hound. The same night the goddess Durga ordered him in a dream to establish his capital at Srinagar. This theme of 'hare hunting hound' or 'snake eating a mongoose' or a 'hare becoming a tiger' is far too common an occurrence where establishment of new townships is concerned. We shall have many more examples as we proceed.

Kotmahadev, where Sita was escorted by Lakshman after her banishment, is near Srinagar. Some places around the area are still named as Sita Koti and Vidya Koti. It was here that Lav and Kush, the sons of Shri Ram caught his horse during the *ashwamedha yajna*. On *Kartik dwadashi*, Sita was taken in the lap of mother Earth. A fair is still held at village Phalkari to commemorate the event.

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11

Pravesh—3

Kotdwar—Lansdowne—Srinagar

OUR NEXT point of entry is only a little further towards east, via Kotdwar—Dogadda—Lansdowne—Pauri—Srinagar and then on to the valley of Bhagirathi or Alaknanda as the destination may demand. Kotdwar is approached via Najibabad which may be reached by train between Ambala—Saharanpur—Mogulsarai and by roads emanating from Panipat, Saharanpur and Moradabad. We can proceed to Kotdwar by road or train. A road journey, however, has its rewards. At a distance of about seven kilometres from Najibabad, a jungle road bifurcates to the left which connects us to Hardwar.

On this route we are on the fringes of the Jim Corbett National Park. Moving little before dawn or after dusk, you are likely to come across a nubmer of wild animals: a herd of *nilgai* and *cheetal*; some sly foxes tracking the hare come out for grazing, a sounder of wild boar with the mother herding the numerous young to the safety of the undergrowth. Here and there, the shining eyes that quickly slink away indicate a wild cat on the prowl. Even during the day, the *nilgai*, *cheetal* and some beautiful birds mostly peacocks and peahens are seen in great numbers.

Lansdowne is the first place on this route meriting detailed description. It is primarily a military station. The Garhwal Regiment was raised here in 1886. The Deputy Commissioner of Pauri Garhwal, Mr. D. Cambell was asked to select a suitable place for a cantonment. Kaludanda, an area of virgin forest abounding in big and small game, lying at a height of about 2,000 metres, was suggested. Approval was given by Brigadier-General Murray, General Officer Commanding, Rohilkhand district. The cantonment was mainly built by the Garhwalis on the self-help basis and occupied on 4th of November 1887. The building activity lasted for more than twenty years.

There is an ancient fort at the highest point called Kalugarhi. The name Kaludanda and Kalugarhi are derived from two holy men, *Kaluns*, who lived here about five hundred years back. They constructed a temple which

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is still in existence and called Kaleshwar Mahadev. Tradition has that spirits of the holy men reside in the temple.

The new emerging cantonment was named Lansdowne on 21 September 1890 after the then viceroy of India, Lord Lansdowne. The town commands a magnificent view of the snows. The climate is generally pleasant. The winters are cold and bracing. The frost is frequent and sometimes it snows at Christmas and around New Year. Summers are enjoyable. The most unpleasant time is during the rains when everything is damp. The most striking view of the Himalayas is obtained during the break in rains.

In 1892, the Oudh-Rohilkhand Railway running between Saharanpur-Mogulsarai extended a branch line to Kotdwar. Till the end of the nineteenth century, there was no road in Garhwal. In 1900, the construction of a cart road to Lansdowne was taken up and completed by 1905. In 1908, *tongas* started plying between Dogadda and Kotdwar. The first motor vehicle was seen when Messrs. Shankar Dass Sohan Lal of Dogadda undertook to carry mail up to Umrikhal. The telephone came into existence in 1918. In 1925, Messrs. Suraj Mal Mahender Prasad of Lansdowne undertook the contract for carriage of mail right up to Lansdowne in motor vehicles!

Since Lansdowne is mainly a cantonment, the places of interest also bear an army character. The first one is the war memorial which was unveiled on 11 November 1923. It consists of a bronze statue of a Garhwali rifleman, a little over life size, wearing the uniform and equipment of 1914 with a sword. The pedestal is made of green marble. Sanskrit and English inscriptions on the pedestal are—

आहवे तु हत शूर, न शोचेत कथंच न ।
अशोच्यो हि हत शूर, स्वर्गं लोके महीयते ॥

Lament not the death of a warrior
Killed on the battlefield,
For one killed in war
Is respected in heaven.

'Josh House' constructed as a mark of respect for the gallant soldiers contains the photographs and names of many who made the supreme sacrifice. A place of pilgrimage is the 'Dias Stadium' constructed in 1968 after late Major John Dias, the famous mountaineer of India. The writer has a personal knowledge of the Dias family. The late Johndy, as he was called by friends, was a perfect gentleman.

A place of general interest and unique beauty is the marble view point affording an excellent view of the snowy ranges. We can see various peaks like Nanda Kot (22,610) East Trishul (22,320), Nanda Devi (25,645), Duna Giri (23,184), Neelkantha (21,640), Badrinath (22,680), Kedarnath (23,770), Bandar Poonchh (20,020) and Mana (23,860) along with a num-

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ber of unnamed peaks.

These hills reverberate with tales of ghosts and goblins. Lansdowne is no exception and has a regimental ghost of the Garhwalis. The story goes that in pre-First World War days, the unit located here had a smart adjutant, Captain X. He was wedded to the regiment and would inspect the quarter guard at odd hours to maintain high standard of turnout and discipline. He was reported missing, believed to be killed in the battle of Neuve Chappelle in the First World War. In autumn 1915, the Garhwalis returned to Lansdowne leaving their adjutant buried in France.

On a certain Wednesday night, the commanding officer decided to visit the guards after a late night in the mess. When he reached the quarter guard, he found that the guard had already turned out and the guard commander with his second-in-command was peering over a small stone wall which ran along the other side of the hill and below which was a sheer drop of 10 metres. He called out sharply to the guard commander and discipline was restored in a moment. When the orderly officer asked him to explain, he said that Captain X had come on a white charger and turned out the guard for inspection. He further said that Captain X inspected the guard and later went over the stone wall. The orderly officer went to the wall and below it but not a hoof mark was to be seen. The sentry and the guard commander stuck to their story next day in the adjutant's office. The matter was discussed by everyone in the regiment. The next visit of Captain X was a week later. On this occasion speaking in what the guard commander described as a hollow voice, Captain X instructed the guard commander to report riflleman Sahib Singh for having a button undone in his tunic. From then on, incident after incident followed. It was quite common for the guard commander to appear in the orderly room with instructions from Captain X to report members of the guards for minor discrepancies. The standard of turnout improved. At times, a jittery rifleman even resorted to firing a shot.

The ghost then appeared in 1947 when the commanding officer was out to a friend's bungalow about a mile from the mess. At 8 p.m, when he came out, his driver told him that an officer on a white horse had gone towards the mess and told him to give his *salam to Sahibs*. The commanding officer asked about the identity of the officer. The driver said he did not recognize him. The commanding officer drove to the mess quite certain that if any officer went in that direction he would catch up with him. But there was no trace of anyone. On enquiry, it was found that there was not a single white horse in the cantonment that day. And the tales go on!

You may also pay a visit to the officers' mess of the Garhwal Rifles which is one of the finest in the country. It contains lots of trophies including hunting trophies presented by the officers. Of the war trophies, there are Turkish field guns, rifles, revolvers and pistols, a German flag, a Chinese flag captured in 1900 and other items. In the hunting trophies, there is a

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white lion shot in Tanganyka in 1932 by Captain E.F. Tucker, eight tigers dating from 1888 to 1930, a snow leopard shot in 1938, three panthers and black and red bears. There are also a number of beautiful heads of *bara singha*, bisons, markhors and ibex. One *bara singha* is actually a *tera singha* for it has thirteen horns.

From Lansdowne, we move down to Pauri and join the road Haridwar-Badrinath at Srinagar.

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12

Pravesh-4

Moradabad—Kashipur—Lansdowne

THE NEXT point of entry into Uttarakhand again converges on Lansdowne but merits a separate consideration for more than one reason; it has its own distinct history and passes through the Jim Corbett National Park. We reach Kashipur from Moradabad. On the main train route from Delhi to Lucknow, we reach Moradabad—famous for its exquisite brass work most of which is exported. If you have time, you may pay a visit to the main shopping centre and keep your pocket strings tight or else you may be tempted. Budget permitting, you may pick up some fine useful and decorative items. From Moradabad, a road takes us to Najibabad which we have already visited. A few kilometres out from Moradabad on the Bareilly road, we come across a bifurcation for Kashipur. A huge board indicates it as the road to Jim Corbett National Park. Turning left, we enter one of the most fertile regions of India where some of the finest *basmati* rice is grown. The whole atmosphere is filled with the sweet aroma of ripening rice. This incidentally is also the old shortest route from Delhi to Gangotri. Crossing Terai, one could go on to the Shivaliks in the Lansdowne area and from there, Srinagar, Tehri, and then along river Bhagirathi to Gangotri and Gaumukh. The new roads generally follow the alignments of the age-old tracks. A journey in olden times would take months if not years. Terai was the worst area for not only was it a highly malarious belt, but was also a haven for the tigers and outlaws; though grouping these two is a little out of place. The tiger has been described as a 'large-hearted gentleman' by Jim Corbett. All the same these large feline creatures do inspire awe. Hence, the journey would be performed in a verv noisy manner talking loudly and giving occasional shouts just to scare the animals away. The noises indicated the pilgrims' progress and would help the outlaws track the parties down! In spite of these conflicting requirements of saving themselves from the animals and outlaws, large numbers always ventured out to reach these ancient shrines for such has been the enduring spell of *Sanatan Dharma*.

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Big towns always developed along the important lines of communications and relapsed into oblivion when the routes shifted. We have seen one such example in Kalsi. The other one along this route of *pravesh* is the area of Kashipur. Remains of an ancient town and a fort are located about one kilometre east of Kashipur. The fort built with large bricks must have been a massive structure at one time but is now in ruins. This place was visited by Huen Tsang in the seventh century. He has called it Govisana. Huen Tsang described the circuit of Govisana as about four kilometres which is so in the case of the town in ruins. There are many water tanks in the area, the biggest of which is called the Drona Sagar. It is believed that the fort at Govisana and the water tank were built by the Padava princes for their guru, Dronacharya. The fort still has a mound in the northern wall which is called Bhim Gada or the Bhim's mace. The tank is considered very holy and a bath is believed to sharpen one's intelligence. Nearby the tank are some monuments of *sati devis*. There are also some ancient temples in decay containing icons of Lord Shiva in different forms, Jageshwar, Bhooteshwar, Mukteshwar and so on. The biggest temple is dedicated to Jwala Devi or Ujjaini Devi. This is the site of an annual fair in the month of *Chaitra* when people come to make wishes and promise offerings in return.

Kashipur was founded by Kashinath Adhikari who was in the service of Raja Baz Bahadur. He selected this place for not only did it fall on the main route to Gangotri but also had the temple of Ujjaini Devi. The descendants of Kashinath held the posts of *tehsildars* of Kashipur and *patwaris* of villages around for generations. His son Shivanath Adhikari founded the village of Shivanathpur. He also planted numerous mango groves which embellish the area to date.

From Kashipur we move to the Jim Corbett National Park and then on to Lansdowne or Nainital. The former route has already been described. The latter will be done presently and the Jim Corbett National Park merits a separate treatment. In case you are interested, you can visit the Ram Ganga Dam. It is the same river we crossed over just outside Moradabad. Asia's highest earth and rock fall dam—626 metres long and 126 metres high, has been constructed here to irrigate 5.75 lakh hectares in Bijnor, Etah, Farrukhabad, Etawah, Kanpur, Meerut, Bulandshahar, Aligarh and Mathura. An 80 square kilometres reservoir and 198 megawatts of power are being generated at a total cost of 133 crores. But what would happen to our prestigious 'Project Tiger' and the other wild life of the area? That is a different story and let us move on to our next point of entry into our coveted "Valley of God".

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13

Pravesh-5

Bareilly—Kathgodam—Nainital—Mukteshwar —Almora—Ranikhet

OUR NEXT point of *pravesh* lies at Haldwani-Kathgodam. From Moradabad, we may go to Rampur, famous for its separate *gharana* of classical singers with the prominent exponent, late Ustad Mushtaq Hussain Khan, Padma Bhushan. From Rampur we may reach Haldwani—Kathgodam—Nainital and beyond. Alternatively, we may proceed via Bareilly—Haldwani—Nainital. People starting from eastern parts like Lucknow may follow the Bareilly route. For convenience we shall start our journey from Bareilly.

Bareilly was at one time the capital of the Rohilla Pathans. They captured the area between foot hills and Delhi in the twilight of the Mughal empire giving their name to this region which came to be called Rohilkhand. The British, following their oft-referred policy of 'Divide and Rule' decided to play Oudh against Rohilkhand. In the ensuing battle between Oudh and Rohillas, the British supported the former. The Rohilla chief Hafiz Khan was killed in the battle of 1774. People soon got sick of the strifes perpetrated by the British and their uncalled for air of superiority which led to widespread unrest. The army gave the lead in May 1857 to oust the traders turned rulers. Bareilly figured in the front ranks and after the arrival of a contingent of soldiers from Ferozepur, all the three regiments located there joined the freedom fighters. Bahadur Khan, the grandson of Hafiz Khan was proclaimed the *nawab.* Some of the Europeans fled to the hills and converged at Nainital. However, as we know, luck was still to favour them and through treachery, deceit and kindling the flames of regionalism, they managed to push the trouble under the carpet for a short period of ninety years before they had to quit in 1947. An example of oft-boasted British justice has already been given in the study of history.

From Bareilly we may proceed by rail or road. The first place enroute evincing tourist interest is the Pant Agricultural University at Pant Nagar. The university with its vast farms is an index of India's green revolution.

The Govind Ballabh Pant University of Agriculture and Technology

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(formerly U.P. Agriculture University) was established in the year 1960 under the State Legislature U.P. Act XLV of 1958. The proposal was initiated by the state government in collaboration with the U.S.A.I.D. The object of establishing the university was enunciated as "for the development of agriculture and for the benefit of the rural people of Uttar Pradesh."

The Pant University started functioning in 1960-61 with 250 students. The enrolment had already risen to 2,192 in 1974-75. The university has six constituent colleges, viz. College of Agriculture, College of Veterinary Medicine, Pant College of Technology, College of Basic Sciences and Humanities, College of Post-Graduate Studies and College of Home Science.

The Pant University has made tremendous achievement in agriculture and has the status of a modern shrine where the well-being of millions is being planned. In wheat, U.P. 310, a triple-gene-dwarf variety has been released for cultivation. It is resistant to most of the plant diseases and has a yield of five to six tonnes per hectare. Varieties for early sowing in October, late sowing in December, suitable for moderate fertility and restricted irrigation conditions have also been developed. In addition, Triticale is being developed for sowing in the hills and plains for which Canada is financing an 'Out-Reach Station.'

Rice is also being developed for slender grain, fairly early maturity (115 days) and resistance to bacterial diseases. The cold resisting varieties are also being evolved. Early maturing varieties of maize D 747 (yellow) and D 742 (white) have been developed. A new hybrid variety, maize Ganga 7 has a great promise for high yields. The same is true of other important crops like soya beans, pulses, oil seeds, sugarcane, sugar beet, millets, forage crops, fruits and vegetables. The new hybrid variety of potato named Kufri Jyoti is a thing of beauty and joy to eat.

The university has a farm area of 4,800 hectares. The gross agricultural products have risen from 7,900 tonnes in 1961-62 to 17,300 tonnes in 1973-74. Profits, from one lakh and sixty thousand in 61-62 have gone up to one crore and twenty five lakhs. The university also has a 'Milk for Millions' project and is rendering a great service in animal breeding and veterinary medicine. A visit to the university can be a real boost for one's morale. It is advisable to take some time off and go through the university before entering the hills. To reach Pant Nagar, one may well take the weekly seasonal flights from Delhi at a distance of 127 air kilometres. The means of communication are developing so fast that any time an older description can get outdated. At the time of the intended visit the latest picture can always be obtained.

Passing through the usual greenery and clumps of mango trees, we reach the fast developing town of Haldwani named after the *haldu* tree (*Adina cordifolia*) that abound in the locality. The town is at a height of about 460 metres. It started as a settlement of the Nayaks, a product of the war between Bharti Chand and Rainka Raja of Doti. It bacame a marketing

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place in the time of George William Traill. After independence, an extensive development of the Terai region was undertaken and a large number of displaced Punjabi farmers were allotted land there. The current affluence of the town is minly due to the grit and hard work of these hardy people. Haldwani has pleasant views of the hills to the north and vast open lush green country to the south. The country in the immediate vicinty alternates between fields and forest, hills and valleys, lakes and mounds.

From Haldwani, we move to Kathgodam, the very name of which means a 'storehouse of wood'. It is the rail-head for entry into important stations of Nainital, Almora and Ranikhet. Moving from Kathgodam, we reach Ranibagh, an old cantonment. The ancient name of Ranibagh is Chitrashila. There was a great rock at the junction of the streams emanating form Naini Tal and Bhim Tal. It was engulfed by a land-slip in 1898. It is believed that Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and many other gods dwell at this spot. There is a huge fig tree near the junction of the streams. Vishnu floated over the ocean on the leaf of this tree. This is probably yet another reference to the Sea of Tethys. Under the same tree, Rishi Satapa Brahma performed severe austerities for many years. He raised his hands to the heavens. The gods granted his wishes. Vishvakarma, the celestial architect was sent to carve the *chitrashila*. The virtues of all the gods were merged into this *shila*. The sage attained *swarga*. Those who worship at the *chitrashila* and bathe in the waters nearby will gain great merit. Even though the *shila* has disappeared, this place continues to be the site of an annual fair.

Lying to the north-west, between Ayarapatta and Deopatta, is the Hundi-Bundi or echo hill. Take a little time and talk to the hill to hear your own voice calling back ! Sounds sweet.

The area we now enter is dotted with a number of beautiful lakes like Naini Tal, Bhim Tal, Sat Tal, Naukhuchia Tal ond so on. The road is excellent and that can sometimes create more problems than it can solve. The vehicles move fast and you have to constantly adjust your balance to offset the dangers of being thrown off to the sides. Road sickness may also catch up with you even if you have strong stomach muscles. It is quite sickening to see others suffering. Anyway, if you have choice, go slow and enjoy the scenery. Better late at destination than early up there!

Our next destination is Nainital which becomes visible from quite far off; more so at night due to the twinkling lights.

Nainital the town, surrounds the Naini Tal lake. The *tal* is situated at an altitude of 1,938 metres. It is skirted by walking avenues and has facilities for boating. The lake changes colours with the advance of light during day. At night with reflections of many lights, it has an enchanting view of unparalleled splendour. There are a number of prominent hill tops around Nainital with open vistas of excellent views all around: Kibury, Ayarpatta, Deopatta, Laria Kanta and Cheena.

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The lake was first seen by the Europeans in 1841. They immediately decided to colonise the area. From its very inception, Nainital became the summer capital of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. The lake was, however, known to the Aryans for centuries and was called *Tri-Rishi Sarovar* or the lake of three sages. The legend goes that three of the seven *rishis*—Atri, Pulsatya and Pulaha—came to Uttarakhand for a pilgrimage to Chitrashila. They started their *samadhi* at Cheena, the highest peak. There was no water. The *rishis* prayed to Brahma who was pleased and poured waters from the Manasarovar lake. A new lake came into being which was named *Tri-Rishi-Sarovar* or the lake of three *rishis*. Later Narayani Devi came to dwell at the place. The *Tri-Rishi Sarovar*, therefore, came to be called Narayani Tal (or Nayani Tal). The second legend is an offshoot of Daksha's *yajna* of Hardwar. When Lord Shiva was carrying the half charred body of his spouse, the eyes dropped off near the 'Smuggler's Rock' from where goddess Nayani sprang up. Smuggler's Rock is still an object of veneration and on festival days coloured lights are burnt in honour of the goddess. The abode of Nayani was of such great merit that Nagdeva Karkoktak blessed the area with immunity to snakes! Nayani now lives at the bottom of the lake. With passage of time, Nayani Tal came to be called Naini Tal.

About the year 1840, a *fakir*, Perambar Baba, built a *dharamsala* near the lake. It stood at the site of the Boat House. Soon after, Lala Moti Ram Sah, a contractor and a banker built a temple of Nayani Devi near the *dharamsala*. The temple and *dharamsala* were both destroyed in the landslide of 1880.

The intrusion of the Europeans was apparently in the year 1841 though some accounts put this year as 1843. Barron, an Englishman settled at Shahjahanpur, has left the first ever written records of the visit in November 1840. He announced the discovery of the lake in the issue of the *Englishman* (Calcutta) in 1841. He also left a vivid description of the abundance of wild animals; the forests all around were criss-crossed by tracks made by countless herds of deer, pheasants appeared so common that they had absolutely to be driven off the camping ground: the scenery was by far the most beautiful sight he had ever witnessed in the course of 1,500 miles of walk in the Himalayas and it would take a month to explore the magnificent scenery around Naini Tal!

Barron visited again in December 1842. This time he came through Bhim Tal and brought a boat with him. He has the unique distinction to have been the first to launch a boat on this sacred lake. After his maiden boating venture, Barron was surrounded by some *paharis* who congratulated him and even compared his appearance on the lake to the emergence of Vishnu from the ocean bed!

By early 1843, a number of building sites had either been granted or applied for. Barron marked off three construction sites for himself and

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his friends. Lushington, the then commissioner of Kumaon started the construction of a small house. The government set aside places for some public buildings. The commissioner planned a bazar and the businessmen flocked in to take lease of land for the construction of shops. The cost of land is reported to have been 12 annas (Re. 0.75) an acre! Building activity quickly picked up speed.

In 1871, Dr. Amesbury sounded the lake and measured it. He fixed the length from east to west as 4,702 feet, the width at Smuggler's Rock as 792 feet and the broadest point as 1,518 feet, the circumference as 11,880 feet and the depth between 20 and 93 feet.

In 1880, a mammoth landslide occured burying those in and around the buildings near the lake. The total number of the dead and missing was 43 Europeans and 108 Indians. The time was probably a quarter to two since a watch found on the body of a boy had stopped at that hour. Relief work was subsequently taken in hand and completed in the shortest possible time. There has been no major slip ever since. The headquarters of the Eastern Command of the Army was shifted to Nainital in 1895. Rents shot up. During 1976 a scare was created by some astrologers that another landslip was due to occur in July-August. Many buffalos and goats were sacrificed to ward off the evil.

For a good view, guides are always available. At sunset, the view near Hanuman temple is just fantastic. The Government Astronomical Observatory and Satellite Tracking Centre are located nearby. The honeymooners may go to Kilbury, an excellent place for a quite week-end in the Forest Rest House. For views of the town and landscape, Land's End and Laria Kanta and for a magnificent views of the snows and plains, nothing like the Naina peak. Views of snow-covered peaks are also obtained from Sher-ka-Danda through powerful binoculars fixed for the purpose. You may also take the youngsters to the mountaineering club which has trained many a rock climber.

A description of the area of Nainital would be incomplete without a mention of other *tals* in the area. The first and nearest is the Khurpa Tal. Situated at a distance of five kilometers, it is an ideal fishing resort.

We next visit Bhim Tal, named after the mighty Pandava Bhim for he carved it with his *gada* for the Pandava's bath.

Situated to the left bank of the Gola river at a distance of about ten kilometres from Kathgodam and 23 kilometres from Nainital, Bhim Tal is a beautiful lake surrounded by hills covered with forests on all sides. The lake is laid in the north-south direction, the length being 1,700 metres. At its broadest, it is approximately 440 metres. It has clear water with a bluish green tinge. It abounds in mahseer. There is a small wooded island to the southern side which looks like a studded gem from the air. A temple built by Raja Baz Bahadur Chand stands near the southren extremity. The temple is dedicated to Bhimeshwar, an incarnation of Shiva.

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The idol is, however, slightly disfigured. This was done by the Rohillas in 1743-44. Their ravages extended to Lakhanpur, Dwarahat, Katarmal and Almora. They had also melted down the gold and silver ornaments from idols by which priceless treasures were lost. While one really feels thankful that those days of plunder and atrocities in the name of religion are over, one wonders what should be done with the temple thiefs and antique smugglers of secular India!

Famous lovers, Nal and Damyanti came to Bhim Tal during their exile. Small pools near Bhim Tal still bear their names. Nal caught some fish and cut them up. However, when Damyanti took them for cooking, the touch of her pious body restored them to life. She was overwhelmed and committed them back to the lake. This added to their misery! From that day, fish of Bhim Tal are extra flat and look as if they have been cut. Seeing is believing. This also led to an age-old proverb in the hills, *Jaba apatiya anchhya, katiya machha tala jani.* (During adversity, even cut up fish revives!)

Naukhuchia Tal or the lake with nine corners is a beauty spot. It is believed that anyone who can see all the nine corners simultaneously will meet with tremendous luck—almost strike a gold mine. None can, however, see all the corners from land. The lake is a bird watcher's paradise and there are numerous legends about birds current in the area. One charming story is about hoopoe, a bird with extra long beak. A child lost his mother at an early age. His father remarried. The child grew up, a playful and naughty youngster. He would disturb his step-mother during spinning and mess up the thread. The cruel woman one day got sick of all this and thrust the spinning needle up his nose. The mother became a vulture destined to live on carrion. The child became a hoopoe and even up to this day calls his real mother '*ama dukh, ama dukh*' (Oh mother, I am suffering without you). The tormented call of the bird sound like '*ama dukh, ama dukh*'.

The lake is about 1,000 metres by 750 metres, at an elevation of about 1,310 metres. It abounds in lotus which look very pretty in season. Fish weighing up to 10 kilos exist in the lake.

Eight kilometers from Bhim Tal is a collection of lakes called Sat Tal. True to the name, the group comprises seven lakes, the largest being about 1,000 metres by 310 metres. Malwa Tal lies about 12 kilometres to the east of Bhim Tal and is about 1,460 metres by the 210 metres. There is an interesting story about its formation. At Churigar, there was a peasant named Malwa. He was a wrestler and a great bully. He fell for a married woman and took her to a cave! Shiva, the lord of mountains was offended by this act and sent a huge land-slip. This dammed Gola river and created a lake. The cave was covered by the slip. The adulterers were buried alive! The area of the land slip is called Malwa-ka-Pair.

We are not yet finished with this route of *pravesh* which is the most developed in Uttarakhand. If you are out for a quieter holiday to a way side

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hill resort of immense charm, scenic beauty and cool fragrant breeze, go over to Mukteshwar. Situated on the Nag Tibba Range at a distance of about 40 kilometres from Nainital and an altitude of 2,500 metres, Mukteshwar has all the makings of developing into an ideal hill resort. It offers one of the most magnificent views of the snow-covered peaks. Important peaks that stand out from Mukteshwar are Ghori Parvat, Nandakna, Trishul, Nanda Devi and Nanda Kot.

Mukteshwar is the seat of the Indian Veterinary Research Institute, a premier research organization of national importance. It has a history. Organized scientific research on the problems of livestock conservation and development started in the country in 1889. Sir Dinshaw Manockji Petit Bart presented five and a half acres of land to the Veterinary Research Institute in Pune. The foundation stone was laid on 9 December 1889 by the Governor of Bombay. The congested surroundings of Pune however, were found unsuitable and the laboratory was shifted to Mukteshwar in the Kumaon Hills. The estate of the Institute is spread over an area of 14 square kilometres with altitudes varying from 1,200 metres to 2,400 metres. The founder of the Institute was Dr. Alfred Lingard, who had studied becteriology in Germany. He lived and worked in the Himalayan forests, far away from the amenities of urban life. Till independence, the name of the Institute was 'Imperial Veterinary Research Institute' and was rechristened to its present name in 1947. Since 1966, the Institute is functioning under the Indian Council of Agriculture Research. A nuclear research laboratory was added in 1968. By virtue of its having immense facilities for research and education, the Institute has also attracted students from abroad namely the Philippines, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Uganda, the U.K. and the USSR.

Our next place of halt on this route can be Almora or Ranikhet. On the way we pass through the town of Bhowali with a fine and flourishing fruit market. It is connected with the fruit-growing area of Ramgarh, an other ideal place for a quiet holiday. Passing through lush green landscape of immense beauty, dotted with clean villages here and there, we come to the bifurcation for Ranikhet and Almora.

In keeping with our practice of moving from west to east, we shall first go to Ranikhet which is reached by crossing the river Kosi by road-bridge and proceeding on by almost a constant climb till the ridge is reached. Idyllic and unspoilt, Ranikhet is one of the most peaceful spots on earth. It has beautiful forests of pine, oak, cedar and cypresses. The sweet fragrance of the breeze blowing through the pine forest is exhilarating. One of the greatest attractions of Ranikhet is the panoramic view it commands of about 300 kilometres of the Central Himalayas, stretching from distant Shri Kailash in Uttarkashy to Api in Nepal.

Ranikhet has an allitude of 1,829 metres and a very bracing climate all the year round. The station occupies a plateau, the summit and sides of which have been terraced for buildings and fields. Most houses have

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lovely flower beds and most fields are bordered by flowering trees. The hills surrounding the plateau in the immediate neighbourhood are lower in height. These are covered with oak and rhododendron trees and the latter offer a most magnificent spectacle during the flowering season. Its quiet walks shaded by lofty pines, its unique mountain views and the colourful flowers on well laid beds make Ranikhet a picture of repose and beauty. Not a sound except the occasional chirping of the brain fever bird. You can literally listen to the silence.

Ranikhet became a military station in 1869. Since 1948, the Training Centre of the Kumaon Regiment has been located here. The Centre itself has some unique attractions for the traveller though a visit will require the sanction of the Commandant.

One of the major attractions of the Centre Officers' Mess is the museum called Thimayya Corner where a few personal belongings of the late general are befittingly displayed. These were donated by Mrs. Thimayya and comprise the Chief's two sets of uniforms and various trophies and mementos presented to him during service. There are also some files and papers signed or initialled by him from the days he was a Second Lieutenant. The visitor may also like to pay homage to the war heroes whose memorial now adorns the Centre's estate. The imposing war memorial has been erected in Somnath Ground, named after Major Somnath Sharma, posthumous awardee of Param Vir Chakra in the Kashmir War of 1948. The memorial was designed by Miss Shona Ray, an architect and interior decorater of Delhi. The base contains a brass urn containing names of all the martyrs. The English and Hindi inscriptions on the memorial read—

To you from failing hands we throw
the torch; be yours to hold it high
If ye break faith with us who die
we shall not sleep.

(John McCrae)

हम अपने अशक्त हाथों से ज्योति शिखा तुमको दिखलाते
ऊँचा इसको रखोगे तुम
भंग करोगे यदि विश्वास मृतात्माओं से
हम न शान्ति से सो पायेंगे।

अनुवादक—श्री सुमित्रानन्दन पन्त

Ranikhet is well-known for yet another reason not really noble. A deadly disease of the poultry called 'Ranikhet disease' has put it on the world map. In India, the first description of this poultry killer was given by Mr. H. Cooper who had his residence at Ranikhet. The disease, therefore, came to be called the Ranikhet disease.

Before leaving Ranikhet for journeys into the interior, it is good to see

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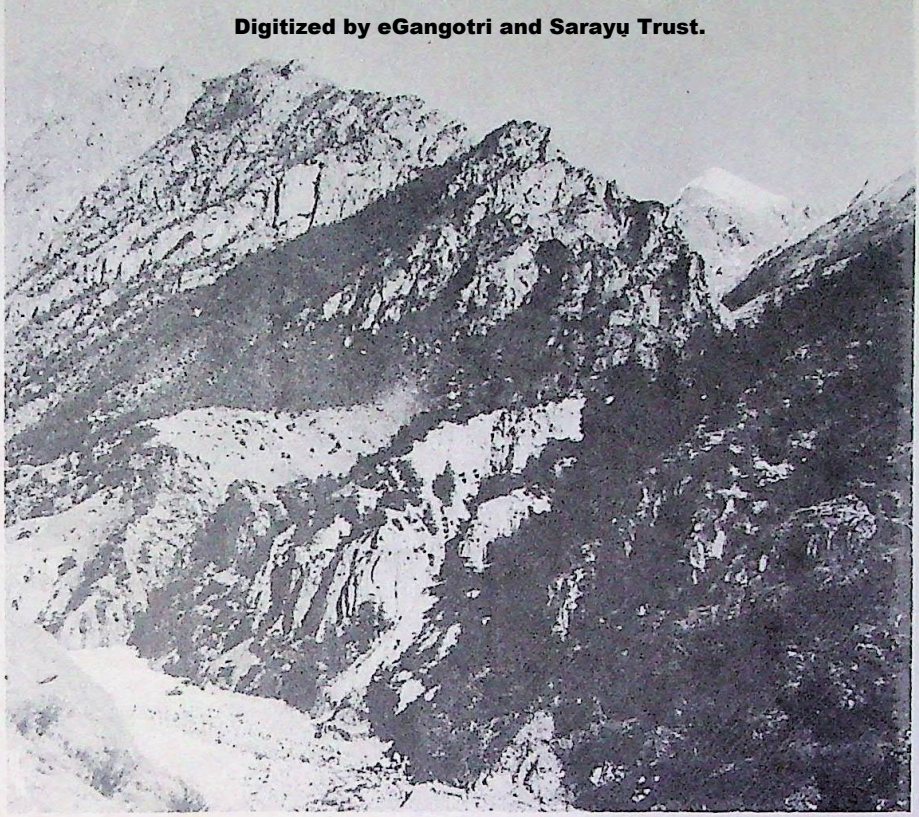

Mount Drona Giri—Hanuman got the *Sanjivani Buti* from here

Hurakiyas of Gorichhal—A scene from Malu Sahi and Rajula

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A river disappears—
Saraswati gorge
near Mana-Badrinath

Saraswati
reappears with
less water.

Ranth—
Competitive spinning.
All the scandals are
hatched here as a
by-product.

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Enroute to Lake Karnakul Kagbhusandi

Nature's sparkler show

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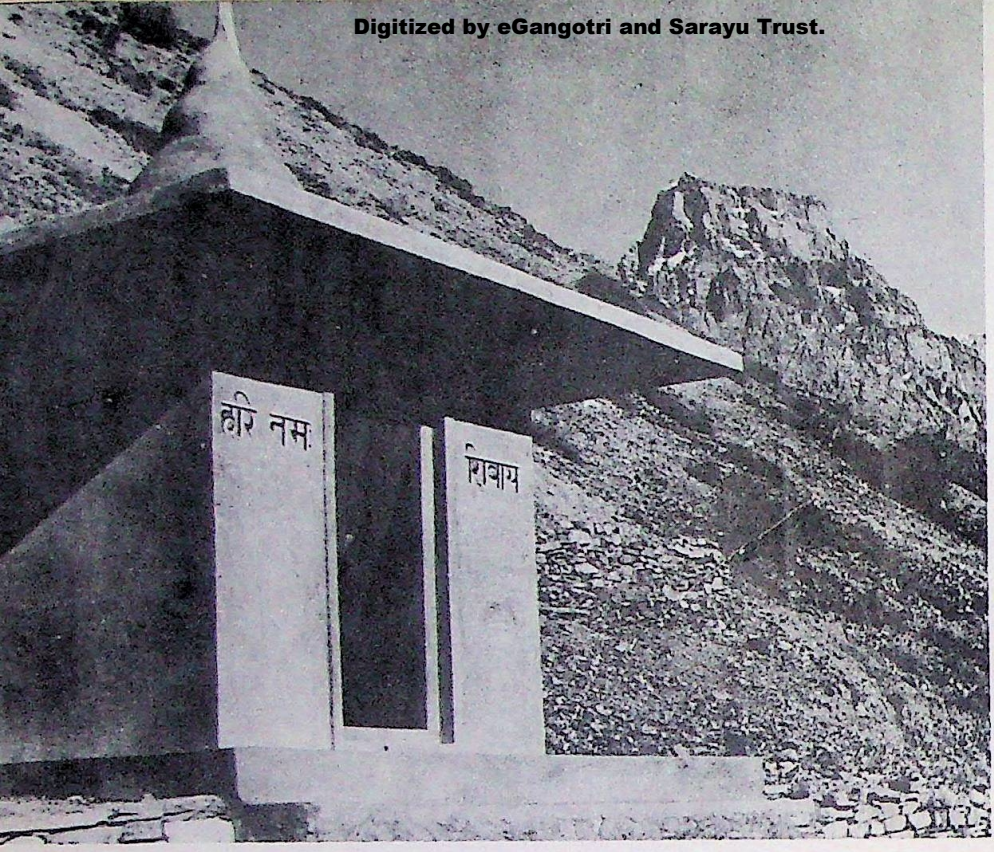
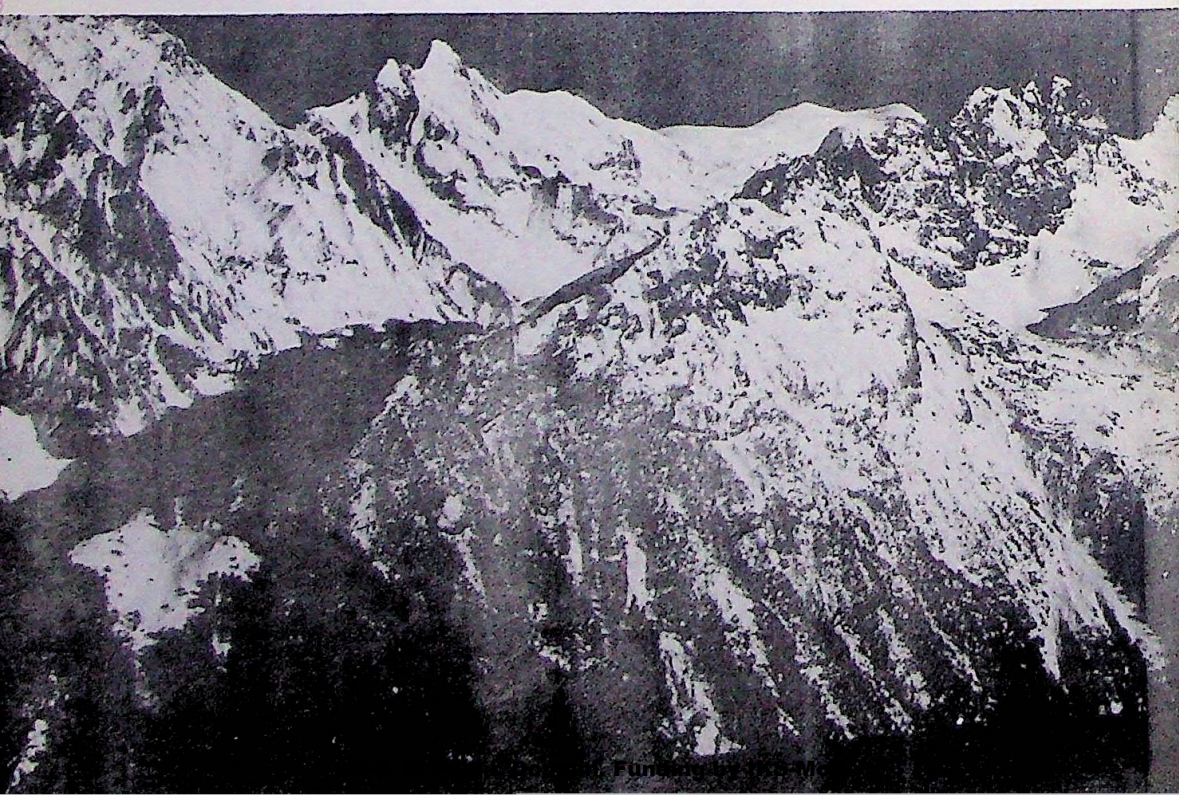


Soldiers' temple of Shiva in the arid trans-Hmalayan region

The *Kalpa Vriks*

Mount Api, the sleeping beauty



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the tree planted by Shri Shnkaracharya at Joshimath

A Bhotia lady of Darma

Gangotri

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Hurakiyas of Bhilangana Vailey—Here Shiva roams as a *Bhil*

Shri Shankaracharyas' *gaddi* at Joshimath

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Children of the Snows—
Bhotia ladies of Vyas

A beautiful view
of Panch chuli from
Chaukori

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Vyas Pustaka—
the *Geeta*

A soldier at
Lipulekh Pass—
The Enemy shall
not pass.

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some fine beauty spots. A walk of three kilometres or a road journey of about ten kilometres takes us to the Bhalu Dam, the water supply works for Ranikhet. It commands a good panoramic view. Chaubatia, at a distance of about ten kilometres is a fruit-growing centre. It has government orchards and a research laboratory. Other places are Upat, with an excellent golf course and a temple of Mahakali, Tarikhet where Mahatma Gandhi had once lived, and Majhkhali with lovely landscape and fine snow views. Many feature films are shot in Majhkhali. Those out for good snow views and solitude may also visit Bilekh at a distance of about thirteen kilometres.

Almora is reached by getting back to Khairna bridge and then proceeding along the left bank of the Kosi. The town Almora was founded by Raja Kalyan Chand in 1560. It is perched on an elongated ridge about 1,638 metres high running from south-west to north-east. The Almora ridge is connected with the higher ridge of Simtola and Kalimat to the west by a mound named Hiradhunga or diamond-stones. The earth on Hiradhunga shines like diamonds in the sun. The valleys of the Kosi and the Swal lie on either side of the ridge.

The history of Almora has a similar legendary origin as many other places in the hills. Kalyan Chand was out hunting in the forest which covered the present site of Almora. A hare chased into the jungle became a tiger! This was considered a very good omen. The raja selected the spot as the site of his future capital. A crowbar was driven at the place of disappearance of the hare which immediately sank deep. When the crowbar was extracted, it was stained with blood. The Brahmins felt that it had penetrated right up to the body of *sheshnag* supporting the Earth!

The name Almora is a derivation from *kilmorah*, a red sorrel (*Rumex hastata*) which grows abundantly in the hills. It is popular with the people and figures in a number of folk songs. The Kumaon rajas, however, always referred to Almora as Rajapur. The Almora fort was built by Rudra Chand. The temple of Nanda Devi was built by Raja Baz Bahadur, a powerful conqueror of his time who subdued the western region of Tibet. The temple has some fine sculptures on the walls. Nanda Devi's birthday is celebrated with great pomp and show. A few buffaloes are sacrificed as offerings to the goddess.

The natural beauty of Almora is greatly enhanced by the surrounding hills, each crowned by a temple. An excellent view of famous peaks Badrinath or Chaukhamba, Trishul, Nanda Devi, Panch Chuli and Api is obtained from the open spaces of Lal Mandi and Parade Ground on the crest of the ridge.

Almora has had the distinction of hosting the well-known Indian dancer Udai Shankar's troupe and it was here that one of his finest ballets 'Kalpana' was conceived and perfected.

Almora has always had a charm of its own. E.S. Oakely has translated

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the poem of a local unknown poet of his time as under :

The hills are all around thee,
O Almora!
The mighty mountains bound thee,
O Almora!
And the skies are blue and bright
In that land of shimmering light,
Where thou gleamest soft and white,
O Almora!
Sweetest breezes blow athwart thee,
O Almora!
Gentle winds of summer court thee,
O Almora!
Roses bloom nigh all the year
In thy golden atmosphere,
And all flowers to thee are dear,
O Almora!
How should e'er my heart forget thee,
O Almora!
In my memory I have set thee,
O Almora!
And the little hillside grave,
Where the wind-swept bushes wave—
There a charge to thee we gave,
O Almora!*

Almora has retained its pristine beauty and grandeur through ages and is one of the finest spots of Uttarakhand. Now we may introduce a few prominent place around:

Simtola, at a distance of three and a half kilometres is easily approachable on foot or pony. It is an ideal picnic spot with a beautiful landscape. Chital, at a distance of seven kilometres by bus is noted for its temple of Goll, Gorill or Gole *devata*, a local deity with a large following in the hills. The Bright End corner, or Brighton Corner, is only about two kilometres and is famous for the snow view which is very attractive around sunset and sunrise. You can also get a good view of the snaking Kosi down in the valley. The conical mountain of Siahi Devi with dense forests is recommended for a refreshing walk.

There is another village near Almora with a peculiar distinction. The dwellers of that village have nothing to fear from ghosts. It is believed that the cremation ground of Almora on the river Swal was a favourite haunt of the ghosts. A large number of ghosts and goblins used to gather there for meetings. All sorts of spooks; headless, without legs, with bleeding

**Holy Himalaya*, pp. 53-54.

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eyes, ears and hair, projecting teeth and without teeth were present. The congregation would make a deafening noise by playing on drums and trumpets. They would follow any passer-by, lure him and devour him. Once a man of Anarya Kot, a real dare devil was passing that way. He somehow managed to catch the leader of the goblins by his hair thus rendering him helpless. The leader had to beg him for life. He was, however, released only after the *bhoot* agreed to protect the people of Anarya Kot from wandering spirits. To-date, Anarya Kot *nivasis* are the recognized sorcerers of Almora district.

Of the nearby beauty spots or places that may be visited keeping the base at Almora, Binsar is the first. It was a favourite resort of Raja Kalyan Chand. Following his example, some wealthy families of Almora used to shift there in summer. Kalyan Chand built the temple of Bineswar, an incarnation of Shiva. It is believed that Lord Shiva protects the property of his devotees, and a thief suffers from calamities till he restores the stolen property manyfold. The town derives its name from Bineswar. Of the legends of Binesar, that of Kalbisht is the foremost. Two hundred and fifty years ago there lived a man named Kalbisht or Kaluwa in village Kwatyura. The villagers were jealous of his success. They conspired with his brother-in-law, Himmat to kill him. Himmat tried many vile schemes but failed. At last he attacked Kaluwa with an axe. A severe fight resulted in which both died. Kalbisht became a deified spirit and protects the interests of good villagers, specially *Doms* who swear by him. The villagers of Bhukunda once wanted to divert the stream. Kalbisht intervened. Since that day the stream has come to be called Bur-ka-Pani or God's River.

In Almora district there are many temples of Bholanath and Brahini, the incarnations of Shiva and Shakti. The legend goes that Raja Udai Chand had two wives and he was more fond of the younger *rani*. Both wives got sons, but he bestowed greater care on the younger child from the favourite wife. This angered the elder boy who left home and fell on evil days. In due course, the younger became *raja*. He sought out the elder who was then living with his mistress, a Brahmani, and put them to death. The killing was done by a gardener. The couple changed into roaming spirits who possessed only the *mali* (gardener) community. So much so, the community constructed eight temples in their honour to appease them. The temples of Bholanath and Brahini have small tridents in front. They have a great following; more so from the *mali* community!

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14

Pravesh-6

Bareilly—Pilibhit—Pithoragarh

STARTING THE journey from Bareilly, we proceed along the road to Pilibhit, at one time known for its thick Terai jungles with many tigers. The Terai region was cleared by a number of powerful Sikh settlers, many of whom lost their lives to malaria and man-eaters. Along this road, the most conspicuous thing is the process of national integration which has slowly taken root. It is not uncommon to see Sikh children playing with their Muslim brethren. The language spoken is also a mixture of Hindi and Punjabi. Here and there, you see the Sikh ladies moving along on their bullock carts; so similar to the 'back home' scenes of Punjab. You may also hear the distant singing of Punjabi *boliyan* (a type of short ode): *Berian nu ber laggade, tennu ki laggada mutiyare!* (The berry trees bear berries; what fruit do you bear, O Sweety!) And so on.

Passing through Khateema, a big timber market and the proposed venue of the college for Tharu girls, we reach Banbassa, the very name of which means the 'Home of Jungles'. Perched in the heart of Terai, the place can be hot and humid during summers but very pleasant during winter. New plantations of eucalyptus add to the primitive charm of Banbassa. Nearby is the base of the Sharda Canal. It is a place worth visiting for its superbly kept lawns and healthy growth of colourful lotus and petunias. From there, we can reach Nepal by crossing a bridge.

At a distance of five kilometres from Banbassa is Tanakpur, the railhead of the metre-gauge railway starting from Bareilly. There are lateral routes from Tanakpur to Moradabad and beyond, along the foothills. At a distance of about five kilometres from Tanakpur by track, is the famous temple of the goddess Purna Giri or Punya Giri. Situated in the thick jungle on a hill with very steep ascent, the temple has the reputation of a fulfiller of all desires. On the eighth day of *Chaitra* every year, a big fair is held when many people go there and make wishes. They tie knots on the grass and promise offerings to the *devi*.

The temple is situated on the narrow top of a cliff where only

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the *pujari* and at the most three pilgrims can sit. It is a special favourite of childless couples who are believed to be blessed within a year.

Moving on from Tanakpur we cross a stretch of primary jungles for about five kilometres and the hill section starts. The beautiful winding road offers some excellent views of the vast expanse of the river Sharda. At one place, a small viewpoint called 'Sharda View' is indicated by a canopy. The view with its vast landscape of intermittent river channels and islands covered with jungles seem ethereal. After the rains, with a clear blue sky when everything bears a washed look, the view is excellent. Crossing a ridge we descend into a beautiful valley. With its houses of white-washed and bright coloured walls and lush paddy fields, the valley offers a look of affluence. Taking a winding route down, we reach the small bazar of Chalthi. One may halt here for a cup of tea or lunch. Huge cucumbers, a very tasty variety, are a speciality, of the area. Some wayside houses are ringed around by flowers mainly the cosmos, the cock's comb, the marigold and the zinnia. The splashes of colour viewed from a distance against the ascending terraces have a beauty of their own.

Just short of Champavat, we get our first view of the snow covered peaks lurking behind the silver curtain of clouds. Right and left and as far ahead as the eye may see are thick jungles of oak, rhododendron and pines. In the distance, the conical form of Panch Chuli appears to rise to the very heavens.

Champavat is situated in a vast bowl. The town now consists of a bazar on both sides of the motor road. At one time, it had its own glory for the Chand rajas had their capital here. The town dates back to the time of Pandavas. The temple of Ghatak Devta or Vir Ghatotkach, son of mighty Bhim, is located nearby. The mound on which temple stands is believed to be Kurmachal of the *Skand Purana* where Vishnu assumed the *Kurma* or tortoise incarnation. A fair is held at the temple annually.

The Baleshwar temple near Champavat has a long history. Two pillars of the temple bear the names of Kirti Stambh and Veerta Stambh, meaning the pillars of fame and bravery. Some copper plates dating back to the early Chand dynasty of Abhaya Chand (1371 A.D.) are held in the temple. A small place called Sui near Champavat also lays claims to have been the Sonit Pura (see Kedarnath).

Champavat is well known for another thing; the Champavat man-eater, that killed 200 men in Nepal and 234 in India had reigned supreme here for four years before she was killed by Jim Corbett.

Champavat is also the birth place of the most popular deity of Kumaon; Gole, Gorill or Goll *devata*. We have already seen a temple of Goll *devata* near Almora. There are many more temples all over Kumaon and the court of Gorill Dev is still more popular than any official court! It is not uncommon for men serving in the Kumaon Regiment to request for leave to go to the Gorill *devata* for settlement of disputes.

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Centuries back, the King of Champavat was out hunting in the jungle. After an unsuccessful chase, he reached the village Dubachaur where he saw two buffaloes locked together in a fight. The *raja* tried to separate them but in vain. Overcome by fatigue and thirst, he sent one of his servants to fetch water. The servant went to the waterfall located in a garden. Near the fall, a young comely maiden was lost in *samadhi*. The servant asked her if he could take water. She slowly opened her eyes and as though recovering from a trance, begged him to keep away and not cast his vile shadow over her. He boastfully told her about his master. He then went to the waterfall and in a hurry kept the pitcher upside down under the fall. The water rebounded splashed on the girl who retorted, "No wonder everything is in a mess for the *raja* is unable to even separate two fighting buffaloes." The servant was astonished at these words and challenged her to attempt it herself.

The girl agreed. She reached the place and after a brief prayer to the deity, advanced and seized each buffalo by its horns and separated them. The *raja* was amazed and asked her who she was. She told him that her name was Kali and that she was staying with her uncle who was an invalid. She was busy worshipping the deity to rid her uncle of his ailments.

The *raja* fell in love with her. He requested her uncle for her hand in marriage. The *raja* entered in the service of the old man who ultimately agreed to the marriage. In due course Kali became pregnant. The *raja* had to leave his capital on some work. She told him that when the time arrived, she would ring a bell on hearing which he should return without any delay. The other wives grew very jealous of Kali and decided to sabotage the arrangement. One of them rang the bell before time. The *raja* returned at once and got very upset for the uncalled for interruption in his official business. When a son was actually born, the *raja* was away. The step-mothers replaced the child with a pumpkin and putting the child in a box, threw it into the Gori Ganga. They told Kali that she had actually given birth to a pumpkin. The box containing the baby boy floated down the current and was caught in a fisherman's net. The fisherman opened it and found a smiling boy inside. He was childless and thinking the boy to be a gift from the Gori, took him home and brought him up as his own son. He named him Garill, the son of Gori. The boy grew up and one day asked his father to get him a wooden horse. He took the horse to the bathing *ghat* where the wicked *ranis* also used to come for a bath. He asked the horse to drink water. The *ranis* laughed at the idea. He retorted that if it be possible for a lady to give birth to a pumpkin, it was also possible for a wooden horse to drink water. The story reached the ears of the *raja*, who sent for Gorill. The boy related the whole story in the presence of the elite of *raja's* court. The child at once attained recognition as the crown prince. The *ranis* were boiled to death.

Gorill succeeded his father. His divine powers were already known and,

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therefore, he came to be worshipped. He was known for his sense of justice. When his last moment arrived, he was approached by his subjects not to leave them. He, however, said that he could not continue in human garb, but would return every three years to see that his people were being treated justly. He then got up and was quickly transformed into a statue. Before the statue, there was a sword, an agricultural implement and normal *puja samagri*. Since that day, Gorill Dev enters the body of a devotee once in three years. Possessed, can even eat live coals without any injury! After his return to heaven, temples were constructed for his worship. Innocent people who are punished by law, hand in a copy of the court decree at the temple and seek justice from Gorill Dev. Within three months, all sorts of misfortunes befall the offender; his children and cattle die, his entire property is lost, his friends desert him and so on. Those who thus get justice, offer a bell to the temple. Thousands of these bells hang outside the temples of the Goll *devata*. Applications for seeking justice from Gorill Dev are kept by the temple *Pujari* and make interesting reading.

Champavat is the first place along this route where apples are grown, The mangoes, plums, apricots and other varieties of good quality fruit grown here are available at comparatively cheaper rates.

Moving ahead of Champavat, the road gently climbs to a pass. An excellent view of the Champavat valley is obtained from the pass. Stretched before you is a valley rich in greenery and extensive terraces with the huge bowl like shape resembling the form of a tortoise, *kurma*.

From the pass we descend into a beautiful undulating grassy tract with *deodar* trees here and there. This is the valley of Lohaghat. Lohaghat gets its name form two legends; one recounting the bloody fight between Krishna and Bana, wherein the latter was slain and a river of blood (*lohu*) ran from the scene of the fight. The soil composed of a deep red clay is believed to be saturated with the blood of combatants. According to the second, the Mahabharata war was fought here and the river of blood flowed from the scene.

Lohaghat has some fine apple orchards and some old villas built by the aristocracy. It can be developed into a fine hill resort. A little above Lohaghat, a road bifurcates for Pancheshwar, the confluence of the Saryu Ganga and the river Mahakali on the Nepal border. It may be pointed out here that we have been moving all along the Indo-Nepal border, which is barely 20 to 25 kilometres to our right. Pancheshwar is a fine fishing spot and a good catch is always ensured. As per local belief, the fish caught after one week from *Baisakhi* are normally the biggest. The place gets its name from *Panch-Ishwar* or the dwelling places of all the five gods of the Hindus—Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Shakti and Ganesh. A sweet variety of orange grows in Pancheshwar valley and offers scope for development.

Another road emanating from Lohaghat takes us to Gurudwara Ritha

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Sahib which can also be reached from Haldwani. This road could well form another entry point into the 'Valley of Gods'. Proceeding further we hit another pass and then cross into the valley of the river Saryu Ganga; traditionally the place associated with the *banavas* of Ram, there is a continuous and constant descent till the river is reached. Half way through, an excellent view of the snow is obtained. It stretches from the hazy outlines of the Chaukhamba to the left and Api to the right.

The village near the bridge is called Ghat. This is the junction of a road coming down from Almora. On the way to Almora, we pass through Rameshwar, the meeting point of the Ram Ganga Eastern with the Saryu. It is a beautiful fishing spot.

Proceeding on, we are in for another constant climb with the road twisting more than before. The climb will now ease only near Pithoragarh, our halting place along this route. Just short of Pithoragarh, we pass the small village of Gyarah Devi or the eleven *devis*.

Pithoragarh is situated in a bowl like valley at a height of 1,760 metres above sea level. It is a budding new cantonment and the headquarters of a new district.

The Pithoragarh valley is about seven kilometres in length and five in breadth. The area is prettily dotted with small villages and is generally devoid of trees. The land is quite level for extensive tracts and is intensively cultivated. Panch Chuli raises its conical head behind the hills to the north. The outline of the mountains enclosing the valley is quite bold and varied with their sides steep as walls in some parts and sloping and grassy in others. We have at last reached our destination and before proceeding further, may rest a while in the quiet charm of this sleepy yet charming town.

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The Highways of the Valley

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15

Yamunotri

YAMUNA, THE daughter of Surya has an unfading aura of romance and delicate feelings of love attached to her. She is always associated with Lord Krishna, the beloved god of millions of Hindus and other communities the world over. The legend goes that Ugrasen, the king of Mathura, had a heartless and cruel son named Kansa. He plotted against his own father, dethroned him and put him behind bars. He then unleashed a reign of terror in his kingdom. The people prayed to God for deliverance from the tyranny of Kansa. There was an *akashvani* that the eighth son of Devaki, a cousin of Kansa, would kill him. Kansa decided to take no chances and put Devaki and her husband Vasudeva under house arrest. He kept a constant vigil and went on killing Devaki's children at birth. No one except Gargacharya, the family *purohit*, was permitted to meet the couple. Devaki and Vasudeva asked him to save their children. The seventh child, Balram was accordingly replaced by a stillborn child by Gargacharya and removed to the safety of Gokul were Rohini, the second wife of Vasudeva brought him up. When the eighth child was due, Kansa decided to take all precautions and chained the captives. The guards were also reinforced. It was on 8th of *Bhadhon*, on a dark stormy night that Lord Krishna was born. Gargacharya, however, was due only an the ninth, that is the following day. Both Vasudeva and Devaki were overcome by intense grief at the inevitable fate of their child. But lo, as soon as the child was born, their chains fell off. Was it a miracle? There was no time to think of that, Vasudeva hurriedly put the child in a basket and decided to steal out of the palace to reach Gokul. The guards were in deep slumber. Vasudeva had no problem in slipping out. He rushed out and reached the bank of river Yamuna, which was in spate. Vasudeva thought this obstacle insurmountable but had no choice. As he moved on, the Yamuna continued to rise. Infant Krishna put one of his legs out of the basket. The Yamuna touched the feet of the Lord and receded. This started the association of river Yamuna with Krishna. Unmindful of the celestial burden,

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Vasudeva moved on and exchanged the child with the newly born daughter of Yasodha and Nand, the *gwala* chief of Gokul. What happened to Kansa has no relevance to our present *yatra* except that Krishna put him to death in due course. The Yamuna has seen many such eras of Indian history start and then come to an end. In the *Gita* Lord Krishna tells Arjuna:

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत
अभ्युत्थानम् अधर्मस्य तदात्मनं सृजाम्यहं ।
परित्राणाय साधुनाम् विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम्
धर्म संस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगे युगे ।।*

Arjuna, whenever righteousness declines and unrighteousness is rampant, then for the protection of the virtuous, the destruction of the evil-mongers and a re-establishment of *dharma*, I incarnate myself from age to age.

It was the Yamuna that witnessed the pranks of Krishna with the milkmaids and heard Krishna's magic flute. More devotional songs have been composed about this association of Krishna with the Yamuna than on any other subject. '*Murliya baji re Jamuna ke teer*', '*Jamuna ke tat par ayi Radha*' and so on. The eternal romance of Radha and Krishna blossomed in her lap. So strong is this association that Yamuna is sometimes considered the incarnation of the eight *pataranis* of Mohan. It was on her banks that Radha used to dance in Madhuban. In Madhuban only, Dhruva tenaciously meditated and insisted on seeing God in person.

The story of Dhruva, the young prince who renounced everything at a tender age to 'meet God' is well known. Hurt by the maltreatment of a step-mother who criticised his low birth, he decided to leave and sort it out with God! And insisted on seeing god in person. Brahma had to yield at last. He meditated in Madhuban on the banks of the Yamuna and insisted on seeing God in person. Brahma had to yield at last. Yamuna, the daughter of Surya had herself worshipped Brahma under similar circumstances as we shall see later. Manu also prayed on her banks and got the boon of ten sons. Such are the mythological associations of this holy river.

Surya went around the universe providing light, life and warmth to the *trilok*. Arun, his charioteer, led the steeds and the god went around his daily business. One day, he saw a beautiful maiden and fell for her. Surya was in a predicament since he could neither stop his daily rounds nor forget the lady who had stolen his heart. He started languishing with resultant ill effects on the universe. Gods got worried about the impending disaster. They deputed Vayu, the ruler of winds, to investigate. Vayu discovered that Surya had fallen for Sanjana, the daughter of Vishvakarma, the architect of the universe. The gods approached Vishvakarma and the celestial marriage was arranged. It was from the holy union of Surya and Sanjana that Yamuna was born. She is, therefore, considered to be the embodiment of life giving qualities of the sun and architectural endowments of her grandfather, Vishvakarma. Sometimes, she is also referred to as

**Bhagwad Gita*, IV: 7 and 8.

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Surya Kanya, the daughter of Surya, or Surya Tanaya, the one carved out of the body of Surya.

Two sons, Yama and Dharma Raj were also born from this union. Sanjana slowly grew weary of the brightness of Surya. She requested Chhaya, her own shadow, to replace her. Chhaya thus became the wife of Surya whilst Sanjana roamed the shady spots in the jungles. Since Chhaya looked exactly like Sanjana, Surya could not make out the change. In due course, Chhaya got her own children, Shani and Tapati. She started treating Yamuna and her brothers badly. Her real identity was thus revealed to Yamuna for no mother would ever ill treat her own children. Yamuna could not stand this and prayed to Brahma for a reunion of her father and mother. Many years passed and Yamuna grew very weak. Brahma at last appeared in person and said, "Yamuna my child, you will see the fulfilment of your desires. You go to *mirtyulok* and relieve the sufferings of mankind. I will bring forth a reunion amongst your parents. During *Kaliyug*, when the Ganga goes to *Patal*, you will again ascend the Brahma Lok." Yamuna consented and came to the *punya bhoomi* of Uttarakhand. Before leaving the heavens, Yamuna went to her brothers on the *bhaiyadooj* day to apply *tilak*. They gave her the boon that any one, no matter what sins he had committed would attain *mukti* if he came to her at Yamunotri and had a bath.

Let us now start on our holy trip to Yamunotri, the source of this sacred river. The shrine is situated at an altitude of 3,292 metres at a distance of 226 kilometres from Rishikesh. As we move out of Rishikesh towards Dev Prayag, to the left we find the road for Gangotri and Yamunotri. So far, the road is up to Hanuman Chatti, the confluence of the Yamuna and the Hanuman Ganga at a total distance of 213 kilometres from Rishikesh. A road has, however, been planned right up to the shrine and by the time you go, it might be completed. A journey from Rishikesh to Narendra Nagar affords an excellent introduction to the everchanging, resplendent, scenic beauties lying ahead. To one side lies the vast valley of Doon diminishing in the distant haze. In front are the beautiful Shivaliks with ever-green jungles clothing the slopes and ravines. Here and there, a nullah rushes on eagerly to loose its identity into Ganga *maiya*. The ascent starts at Rishikesh itself. After about eight kilometres, the *sal* trees are replaced by the pine belt with a peculiar musical hissing of the pine leaves in the breeze and welcome scent of the resins. The road spirals through lush jungles. Colonies of *langurs* and the rhesus monkeys are encountered along the road. I once witnessed a unique sight; two *langurs* trying their strength in a wrestling bout with other members of the group sitting around and watching the fun. The initial antics of the opponents were exactly like those of the wrestlers in an arena.

The road snakes its way on to Narender Nagar, the first halting place. Situated at a distance of about 16 kilometres from Rishikesh, Narendra Nagar owes its establishment to Raja Narendra Shah of Tehri who selected

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this site as his winter capital in 1920. He built beautiful palaces and moved to Narendra Nagar in 1930. One of the palaces affords a splendid view of the Doon and has been converted into a rest house. The Ganga shines like a streak of silver during day and moonlit nights. We are now at an altitude of 1,173 metres. It is good to take a little rest here and get ready for the next part of the journey. If you ever get a chance to witness a sunset at Narendra Nagar, do not miss it. The scene simply defies description. Moving on, we ascend to a height of about 2,000 metres where the road crosses a pass affording an excellent view of the valley of the river Ganga in her last efforts to emerge from the golden locks of Shiva. There is a maze of distant hills, slopes and valleys with their lush greenery. If distance lends charms to the views any where, it does so here and does it better than anywhere else. After the pass, we descend to cross the Huinil river, a tributary of the Ganga and then the ascent starts again till we reach the small town of Chamba. It is here that we get the first glimpses of the snow clad mountains. To the left are Bander Poonchh, Srikantha and Gangotri Sisters, in the middle are Kedarnath and Badrinath and to the right are Nanda Devi and Trishul. The road from Mussoori joins up at Chamba. From here to Tehri, it is a constant descent. We are now entering the valley of the Bhagirathi prior to her confluence with the Alaknanda at Dev Prayag. We meet the Srinagar-Gangotri-Yamunotri road at Dobat, about three kilometres short of Tehri and if we so choose, we may turn left and proceed direct to Yamunotri. A visit to Tehri is, however, not out of place. We have also covered a distance of about 65 kilometres from Narendra Nagar and a longer halt is now called for. Moreover, who knows after this visit whether you may be able to see this beautiful town again or not. In times to come, Tehri will get submerged in the artificial lake being created under the multi-million rupee Tehri Dam Project. The project has many stages and will cost 3,005 crores. This will of course be revised upwards. When complete, it will result in the creation of a huge lake that will submerge Tehri and many other villages. If you were observant, you might have seen a board about three kilometres short of Dobat 'New Site for Tehri'. Or maybe you have actually reached the new town and never had the privilege of seeing the old city which might now be at the bottom of the lake like the once affluent towns of Atlantis, the lost continent.

Tehri is situated at a height of above 770 metres at the confluence of rivers Bhagirathi and Bhilangana Ganga. The holy confluence is called Ganesh Prayag. Bhilangana collects the water from the western slopes of Kedarnath and southern slopes of Bharat Kunte. The river is so named because Shiva is said to roam its upper zones in the garb of a *Bhil*. Tehri has old temples of Shri Kedarnath, Badrinath, Laxmi Narayan, Raghunathji, Sateshwar, Mahadeva, Narbadaeshwar, Bhagwati Durga Mata, Kali Devi and Shitala Devi. This is also the seat of the world famous Divine Life Society of Swami Sivananda. In fact, the post office for the

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society is called Sivananda Nagar. As can be seen from the map, Rishikesh-Narendra Nagar is not the only route of reaching Tehri. Depending on the place of start, one may came to Srinagar, Kirtinagar and then across a pass to Tehri. This road passes through picturesque country and has some of the finest pine jungles in whole of Uttarakhand. The view of the snow from the top of the range separating the Alaknanda and Bhilangana valleys is indeed magnificent. The Kedarnath peak seems to rise to the very heavens. One could also reach Tehri from Dev Prayag via the foot track along river Bhagirathi. Here also, one passes through beautiful countryside. A road has been planned along this route as well.

Tehri is also a town of historic importance. This town remained the seat of Garhwal rajas till 1949, when during the reign of Mahendra Shah the princely states were merged with Motherland by S. Patel. Raja, however, exercised control over the management of Badrinath and Kedarnath temples though both of them fell within British-Garhwal. This led to strange problems, the full details of which will be given under relevant chapters.

For onward journey to Yamunotri, we return to Dobat and then proceed along the beautiful valley of river Bhagirathi flowing to our right. It is a lush green valley with fine terraced paddy fields. To reach Yamunotri, we will not cross Bhagirathi any where. About four kilometres from Tehri, a track descending from the left meets the road. Mussoori is barely 20 kilometres through this track and a board has been put to indicate the bifurcation. This is yet another way of reaching Yamunotri via Mussoori. For lovers of adventure, Uttarakhand offers many such opportunities. Moving on, we pass the villages of Siva, Baldiana, Chham, Nagun and reach Dharasu. From Baldiana, a road leads to Mussoori and Dehra Dun. Baldiana is the first place where locally grown apples are available. All types of wooden jars are also made and sold here.

Dharasu is 42 kilometres from Tehri and is barely 1,036 metres in altitude. We can halt here for afternoon tea. One of the tea shops sells excellent *chane* and *halwa*. The owners claim that this has been their ancestoral business for generations. At Dharasu, we come across the first rest house constructed by Mr. Wilson, an Englishman whose name here is synonymous with quality. We will hear more about him during our visit to Gangotri. About two kilometres ahead of Dharasu, the road for Yamunotri branches off to the left whilst the main road leads on to Uttarkashy. On our journey to Yamunotri, we pass the villages of Kalyani, Silkiyara, Ranikhet and other small *chattis* which have lost their importance after the construction of the road but still offer a refreshing cup of tea. From Ranikhet, the road leads to Barkot and a track bifurcates for Uttarkashy. There are huge apple orchards at Barkot. We get the first glimpse of Yamuna at Dandal Gaon. From here a road goes to Kalsi and on to Dehra Dun along with a link road to Mussoori. When fully developed, the road will serve as the

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shortest link with the plains below and will give a pick to the economy of the area. Barkot in fact has all the makings of a major communication centre. Roads from Mussoori, Kalsi, Chakrata and the track from Uttarkashy all converge here.

From Barkot, the road runs along Yamuna to Gangnani, the first place of pilgrimage. There is a *kund* at Gangnani which is believed to be connected to Bhagirathi through an underground channel. It is called the Ganganayana Kund. A dip in the *kund* is, therefore, considered holy and auspicious. There is also a temple here with idols of both Ganga and Yamuna. There is a proposal to link Gangnani with Nakhuri on the Uttarkashy road. Yamuna and Bhagirathi are barely 15 kilometres apart here and in fact nowhere else till Prayag do they come so close. The road will serve as a short-cut between Yamunotri and Gangotri.

Near Gangnani we first get a fine view of the snow ranges. The mountains are in the Great Himalayan chain and are called Bander Poonchh; the monkey's tail. From this direction of approach two beautiful snow peaks are visible though the belief of the people is that there are five peaks. *Swarga rohini*, the way followed by Pandavas in their ascent to heaven lies near Bandar Poonchh. It is also believed that the Pandavas still reside on them.

The name Bander Poonchh is also associated with a legend. Hanuman visited Bander Poonchh during his search for *sanjivani buti*. The place is now visited by a single monkey in *Phalgun*. He reaches Bandar Poonchh via Hardwar. He stays a whole year on the peak and goes back only after he is replaced by a fresh visitor. Many people claim to have seen him.

Yamuna takes source from Kalindi Parvat, in the Bander Poonchh ranges and hence is also called Kalindi. Is not that a pretty name? One is simply struck by the aesthetic sense of our ancestors who gave such sweet sounding names to our hills, rivers and the countryside. The rest of the journey is now along Kalindi. Passing through Yamuna Chatti and Sayana Chatt, at last we reach Hanuman Chatti, the present road-head. Yamunotri is barely 13 kilometres from here. An overnight halt is called for. It is better to start the onward journey early in the morning. The journey on foot and the climb must be covered slowly so as not to put any undue strain on the heart. In higher regions, the density of air becomes lesser and the heart has to work faster to maintain requisite supply of oxygen for purifying the blood. Thus, you may notice that as altitude is gained, the pulse rate goes up. The natural flexibility of the human system, however, comes into play and the heart and other organs go on progressively adjusting to the new environment. This is the process of acclimatization. It is never good to hurry it.

Slow and steady, let us move on. Let us keep some time to 'stand and stare'. We are in a valley of untold charm and scenic beauty. As we look around, pines have already given way to *deodar*. Flowers grow in wild

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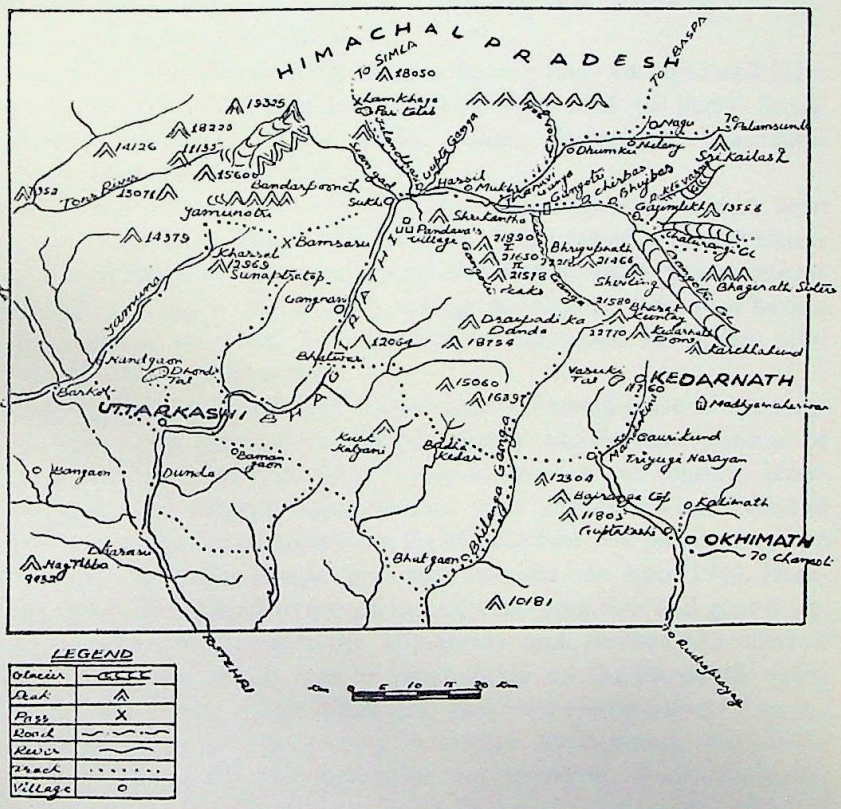
YAMUNOTRI - GANGOTRI - JADHGANGA



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profusion. The valley is full of wild roses and the early morning breeze is filled with their sweet fragrance.

From Hanuman Chatti, there are two routes for Yamunotri; one on each side of the river. It is difficult to say which one is steeper than the other. Either way, we are in for a tough climb. We may cross the Yamuna to the right bank over a bridge and proceed via Markandeya Tirtha where Rishi Markandeya meditated and wrote the *Markendya Purana*. The first hot spring on this journey is encountered here and a bath is refreshing as well as auspicious. Alternatively, we may keep to the left bank and reach Kharsali, the confluence of the Yamuna and the Nil Ganga called Shani Prayag. A temple of Shani stands near the confluence. Shani is Yamuna's brother. Worship at the temple is sure to rid devotees of ill effects of unfavourable stars and constellations.

Yamunotri is equi-distant from Markandeya Tirtha and Kharsali. The climb takes about five to six hours and there is no need to hurry. Enjoy the matchless beauty and charm of the valley. The climate is bracing, healthy and deliciously cool. Relax.

Starting early morning, we reach Yamunotri by lunch and will now have a good view. We have had a difficult trek. It has tested our endurance to some extent. But it is time to remember that human beings have attempted these heights under much more trying conditions. Before we have a view, let us amuse ourselves with the exploits of a few foreigners who visited Yamunotri without a visa!

During the Second World War, Dehra Dun witnessed some of the most daring escapes from internment camps. Harrer, the German prisoner of war who wrote *Seven Years in Tibet* is well-known for his venture. However, the pair who deserve equal laurels were Hanskoop and Edmund Kramer. They were both brought from the Middle-East and put in the camp at Dehra Dun. A daring escape plan was hatched. In April 1940, Hanskoop and Kramer managed to escape in a cart carrying cow and goat dung. After their escape, they took to the Himalayas and reached the valley of Yamuna. Their ultimate aim was to reach Sukhi in the Bhagirathi valley and thence on to Tibet. Near Mussoori, they were apprehended by two policemen and taken to a *dharamsala* for further investigation. They, however, offered whisky to the policemen and got them drunk. Thus they managed to escape and headed towards Yamunotri. To avoid arousing suspicion on the way, they posed as doctors. At Kharsali, they met some pilgrims at a *dharamsala*. They managed to sell some artificial gems for a hundred rupees and immediately converted the money to woollens and eatables. Splendidly set up for their further journey, they slipped out at two in the morning. They turned off in the direction of the Bumser pass (Bamsaru Khal) into the wilderness. The pass was in deep snow. They were trying the impossible. They moved on. Such is the love of freedom. There was not a human soul for miles around. They, however, had other company

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and met coveys of snow cock. They tried nets and snares for the birds who were equally keen on freedom. Soon these denizens of the colder regions were also left behind. Far and wide, there was only a thick layer of snow with a dazzling glare. Everywhere danger lurked, snow holes, crevasses and abysses which threatened their progress. Under these circumstances, it was quite hopeless to attempt the pass. They retraced their steps and reached a shepherd hut where they prepared to rest. It was cold and they lit a huge fire. In their anxiety to get warm quickly, they set fire to the hut and failed to salvage a part of their baggage including the woollens. Coming back to Kharsali, they turned left to strike the Bhagirathi valley. After three and a half nights, they managed to reach Uttarkashy and moved on to Harsil. They were again apprehended near Bhatwari by four policemen and taken back to Uttarkashy. Now they posed as Americans. Pending confirmation, they were kept under watch and, in fact, under room arrest. They stayed comfortably for two days during which they secretly made plans for another escape. Removing the *niwar* from a cot, they climbed out of a ventilator. This was by no means the end of their adventures but ultimately they did manage to reach Tibet. It was in this region that these daring souls had treaded and succeeded in their mission in spite of numerous hurdles. Sitting comfortably at Yamunotri, as you look up towards Bander Poonchh, to the right are the trackless woods where they once roamed. Was it a boon of Yamuna that they achieved *mukti* from their tormentors in spite of heavy odds! Who knows!

Yamunotri is about 3,292 metres high. This is a considerable altitude and there is quite a chill in the air. The valley is otherwise lush green and the view all around is truly magnificent. The water of the stream is cold and barely tolerable. Immersed portions of the body quickly tend to go numb. People therefore, sit on the banks and hurriedly pour some water on the body to get over the ritual. There are two *kunds* at Yamunotri, Surya Kund and Gauri Kund. The temperature in the Surya Kund is above the boiling point —32.4°C. People tie potatoes, rice and pulses, etc. in cloth bags and put them in the water. Items get boiled in a little time. Even when uncooked *chapaties* are put in it, they get fried in the water and surface as cooked *chapaties*. This is considered as *prasad* of Yamunotri. The water in the Gauri Kund is lukewarm in which a bath is very refreshing. Next to Gauri Kund is a cave that serves as a dwelling for ascetics some of whom stay on during winter. Is it the lure of the mountains that makes them leave their homes? Or is it the irresistible call of the Eternal Being and the happiness of complete freedom? One wonders. Meeting some *sadhus*, you are impressed by the great peace and calm which glows on their faces. It is by giving up or giving away something, that one gets this peace. Near the ascetic's cave is a hot spring from which water keeps spurting out. This is called Gaumukh. The prayers and offerings to Yamuna are made at Gaumukh. We will see another Gaumukh when we

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proceed on pilgrimage to Gangotri. Let us now see the temple dedicated to goddesses Yamuna and Ganga. The icon of Yamuna is carved out of black stone. The Ganga, to the left of Yamuna, is fair damsel in white. The *pujaris* are from Kharsali where they move during winter.

Before we move on journeys to other places in this 'Valley of Gods', let us visit the glacier which is barely seven kilometres up from Yamunotri. A large variety of wild flowers embellish the route. In the untreaded landscape, the bear and *barhal* are still encountered in great numbers. As we move on, we realize that on the mountains on one side, there are the remains of older and much bigger glaciers which must have filled the whole valley. Mount Bander Poonchh appears to be rising to the very heavens. From its face issues out the cataract of ice coming down as glacier. From the side valleys, smaller glaciers offer their tributes to Yamuna. Trudging on, we reach the snout from underneath which emanates Kalindi cascading down in its eagerness to reach *Triveni sangam* at Prayag. There may be few comparable spots of such magnificent scenery in the world which have as easy an access as this.

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16

Visit to Gangotri

नमो भगवत्यै दशपापहरायै गंगायै
नारायण्यै रेवत्यै शिवायै दक्षायै अमृतायै
विश्वणपिण्यै नन्दिन्यै ते नमो नमः ।।

"Oh goddess Ganga, the destroyer of the ten worldly sins, obeisance to you. Oh goddess Narayani, who is bright like the planet, Revati, oh thou Lord Shiva's consort, daughter of King Daksha, and the bearer of amrita; thou with a universal expanse, and giver of happiness—salutations to thee, again and again."

RIVERS HAVE been worshipped and feared by men all over the world, and throughout history and pre-history. No river has, however, inspired so much love, devotion and reverence as has the Ganga. It is not just a river but a symbol of purity, the cleanser of all sins and a mother goddess who has to be propitiated on all stages of life, from birth to death. In the heaven, Ganga is born from Vishnu's great toe and flows through the skies as the milky way. She descends from the *Brahma Lok* onto Himalayas where Shiva receives her in his tresses of gold.

Ganga has been given many names to signify her qualities: *Vishwa pavini*, the purifier of the universe: *Bhaya harini*, remover of fear: *Shubhangini*, having sacred and beautiful limbs; *Lokanadi*, the river of the people *Trilok pavini*, purifier of three worlds ond so on.

The *Skand Purana* gives the means of attaining salvation during different ages; *satyuga*, by *dhyan* or meditation: *treta* by austerities or *Yoga*: *Dwapar* by *tapasya* or worship and during *Kaliyuga* or the present times by a bath in the holy Ganga. The *Brahma Purana*, the *Valmiki Ramayana*, the *Vishnu Purana* and the writings of Shri Guru Shankaracharya are full of eulogies of Ganga. So widespread has been the reputation of the river, that at one time, Alexander spoke of the Ganga as his final destination.

In dimensions, Ganga does not even figure in the first 25 rivers of the world. Two other rivers in the Indian subcontinent itself, the Sindh

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and the Brahamputra are bigger than her. She issues forth at Gaumukh as Bhagirathi and loses her identity in the Bay of Bengal near the Sagar Island after a course of 2,500 kilometres. As the Bhagirathi, she runs a tumultous course for 250 kilometres before she is joined by the Alknanda, the second tributary of the Ganga at Dev Prayag. From there the combined stream gets the name of Ganga. There is, however, a minor controversy. Some give it the name of Ganga after it has crossed the Lakshman Jhoola at Rishikesh.

There are many mythological legends about *Ganga-avataran* or the birth of Ganga. Sagar, a descendent of Ikshvaku clan was the king of Ayodhya. He had two wives: Keshani and Sumati. He was issueless and constantly grieved over his misfortune. He performed severe penances and pleased Rishi Bhrigu by his devotion. The Rishi was pleased and granted his wish. Keshani was blessed with a son named Asmanjas. Sumati begot sixty thousand sons. The king was very happy and ordered a *sadavrata* for Brahmins and gave alms to the poor. For 61 days, the doors of his treasury were kept open. Pandits chanted prayers for the longevity of his children and prosperity of the empire.

The king's pride grew along with his sons. He started considering himself God embodied and even coveted the kingdom of Indra. To assert his supremacy, he decided to perform the *ashvamedh yjana*. He bade his sons roam the empire and get the finest white steeds. The horses were let loose to roam the heavens and claim them for the king. Indra came to know of the evil designs of Sagar. Disguised as a demon, he led one horse towards *Patal*, where Kapil Muni was in meditation. On disappearance of the horse, Sagar flew into a rage and ordered his sons to search the horse in *trilok* and not to return till they had found it. They roamed the empire but there was no trace of the missing horse. They decided to search in *Patal* and started digging the Earth to reach there. At this, *Prithvi* complained to Brahma about the pain and grievous injury being caused to her by the heartless sons of Sagar. Brahma asked her to be patient for the reckless princes would soon meet their doom.

The princes at last came upon Kapil Muni. He was lost is *samadhi*. The horse was grazing nearby. Thinking the *muni* to be a thief, they rudely disturbed him. The sage was furious and burnt the princes to ashes by his curse. Sagar waited for many years. His desire for the throne of Indra was replaced by a gnawing worry on account of the long absence of his sons and he became anxious to do something. He requested his grandson Ansumat to go and find his uncles. The younger prince searched all over but in vain. He was met by *Garuda* who advised him to contact Kapil Muni. Ansumat proceeded by the path taken by his uncles and reached the hut of Kapila Muni in *Patal*. The sage was in *samadhi*. He waited till the *muni* opened his eyes and then politely asked him for help in finding his uncles. Kapil was pleased with Ansumat's good manners and told

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him the whole story. He also told him that the princes could only be revived by *Gangajal*, the water of the celestial river Ganga. Ansumat bowed to the sage and returned to Ayodhya with the horse where *yajna* ceremonies were completed.

Sagar tried to persuade Ganga down from *Indralok* but in vain. He beseeched Ansumat to try for the resurrection of his uncles. But he died an unhappy man as Ansumat failed, and so did his son Dilip. The task ultimately devolved on Bhagirath, the great grandson of Sagar. Bhagirath sat in meditation and lived many years as an ascetic to fulfil his mission. So great was his devotion that Brahma's *sinhasan* shook. The Lord learnt of his devotee and was obliged to ask Bhagirath about his mission. The king requested for the descent of the Ganga for the salvation of his ancestors. His wish was granted but a new obstacle came in the way. Ganga declined to leave heaven. She threatened that her fall would be unbearable for *Prithvi* for she would cause a deluge.

Brahma told Bhagirath to approach Shiva for he alone could receive Ganga in his *jata* and break the fall. Bhagirath went through another series of penances to appease Lord Shiva who ultimately agreed to bow before the wish of his devotee. Ganga descended with full fury on Mount Kailash but was caught in the golden tresses of Shiva. All her efforts to free herself were in vain.

For many years Ganga wandered aimlessly among Shiva's *jata* and failed to get disentangled. At last she requested him for freedom. Then came another obstacle to try the perseverance of Bhagirath. Mahadeva was lost in *samadhi* and was oblivious of the plight of Ganga or the wish of Bhagirath. The king waited patiently and at last Shiva agreed to release his captive.

Thus Ganga slowly flowed out of Shiva's locks in ribbons of water to the parched earth of *Bharatavarsha* and gave rise to the many rivers of Uttarakhand. She followed Bhagirath who led her towards the place where the ashes of his ancestors were lying. The hermitage of Rishi Jahnu was on the way. The *rishi* was performing worship of Bhairon, his select *devata*. In her gushing and foaming course, Ganga damaged the hermitage. Jahnu got annoyed and drank up the whole river. This was yet another obstacle and Bhagirath had to pray to the *rishi*. At last Jahnu agreed to release Ganga and let her emerge out of his thighs. From this incident, Ganga came to be called Jahnavi.

Some scholars have tried to explain the legend as an allegorical representation of feats of engineering: sixty thousand sons signifying the suffering population, different obstacles before Bhagirath as the engineering problems faced by him, the thick jungles of the Himalayas as the *jata* of Shiva and the porous land of *Ukhar Bhoomi* as Rishi Jahnu who drank the river. It is pertinent here that the story of Bhagirath has much in common with the Helenic tale of Sisyphus giving a possible clue to the

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common heritage of early Greek and Aryan civilizations. Be that as it may the Ganga flowed along and its holy water touched the ashes of sixty thousand sons of Sagar who were revived to life. The entire universe rejoiced. Brahma performed a *yajna* at Prayag for thanksgiving. Vishnu also blessed her. Bhagirath's name become synonymous with perseverance of the highest order; and the Ganga was given the name of Bhagirathi.

The place where Bhagirath underwent his series of penances stands next to the temple at Gangotri. The day when the Ganga emerged from Shiva's locks was the tenth day of the bright phase of the moon during a *Jyeshth*. It is an auspicious day called *shukla dashami* and is celebrated as *Ganga Dussehra*. Gates of Gangotri temple are opened on this day.

At one time, there was a fruitless and pointless discussion as to which of the two main streams joining at Dev Prayag had the real claim to be called Ganga. Some thought Alaknanda, being the longer of the two, had a superior claim. Some scholars even now support this. If length is the main criterion, then probably the Alaknanda may win but it is the Bhagirathi which has always been considered the true Ganga. Both rivers take source from the glaciers of Badrinath. Gangotri glacier is the biggest in Uttarakhand and has a number of tributary glaciers. The Bhagirathi emerges as a major stream from Gaumukh and unfordable from its very source. Not so the Alaknanda or more appropriately Vishnu Ganga which emanates as a thin streak from the comparatively smaller glaciers called Bhagirath and Satopanth.

The Ganga is 2,500 kilometres long and three kilometres wide at the broadest. The rainy season cannot affect the length but the other variable, i.e. breadth tends to become more than 10 kilometres at places. Compared to the Amazon the width of which is more than 90 kilometres, the mighty Ganga appears too tiny.

The urge to explore the river to its source is as old as the Aryan settlements. Countless millions have treaded its banks from the sea to Gaumukh. Akbar the Great (1556-1605) sent an expedition to the Himalays to find out the source of the river. In fact, the first sketch map of the Himalayas was drawn in 1590 by Father Monserrate, a Spanish missionary in the court of Akbar.

Abul Fazal, the historian of Akbar has recorded that the emperor always drank Ganga water. Even when the emperor went out on expeditions water was taken from Hardwar.

In 1807, N.S. Webb of the East India Company was deputed to explore Ganga's sources. In 1808, Captain Raper was sent to achieve this mission. It was only after 1857, the First War of Independence, that the British could achieve this mission.

Another account about the descent of Deva Kanya, as the Ganga is called, runs thus :

Once Ganga come to the *sabha* of Brahma in fine attire and heavily made

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up. On the arrival of Vayu, her attire flew off revealing her beautiful curvaceous body. Rajrishi Mahabish cast lustful glances at her. She also seemed to enjoy the attention. This enraged Brahma who cursed both of them and expelled them from heaven to enjoy their amorous feelings on the Earth. They were then born as Raja Shantanu (of the *Mahabharata*) and his consort. The legend is fully narrated in the *Adiparva* of the *Mahabharata*. Pratipa, the father of Shantanu was performing *puja* at Hardwar. Ganga came as a beautiful lady and sat on his right thigh. As per custom, a man's children and son or daughter-in-law sit on the right thigh whereas the spouse sits on the left thigh. Pratipa, therefore, married Ganga to Shantanu. Seven children were born to her but all died. By the time eighth child was born, the effect of the *shap* was over. Ganga returned to heaven along with the child and brought him up there. The eighth son was named Ganga Datt or Dev Vrata. Ganga Datt, also had his own earlier account to settle. In his previous life, he had been instrumental in stealing *Kamadhenu* from the *ashram* of Rishi Vashishta and had been cursed that he would be deprived of the company of the fair sex. After the return of Ganga, Shantanu was woe-begone and spent most of his time in *shikar*. Once he saw a comely maiden in a boat in the Yamuna and fell for her. She was the daughter of a fisherman. On being accosted for the hand of his daughter, he put forward the condition that her children would ascend the throne. Shantanu declined but could not forget her. Dev Vrata came to know of the predicament of his father. He decided to abdicate his rights to the throne. He also decided not to marry so that even his descendants could never lay claims to the throne. This was his *bhisma pratijna*, the most difficult vow and he came to be called Bhishma Pitamah. Thus we see that Ganga is intricately and intimately connected with two of the most difficult human feats; *bhagirath prayatna* and *bhishma pratijna*. Or is it indicative of the stupendous engineering difficulties in changing her course to a favourable direction? Many scholars are of the view that the Ganga started her career as a canal: that on the hills on her banks, marks of excavations are still visible to the discerning eye: that it took seven generations to complete the construction task!

What happened to Bhishma Pitamah is beyond the scope of this narrative except that later when Bhishma was dying without a child, he was given a boon by Lord Krishna that all sons of Bharata would perform *shraddha* for him. To date, Bhishma Pitamah is always made offerings at *shraddhas*.

According to another legend, Ganga, the daughter of Himalaya and Menaka fell for Mahadeva. At marriage, seeing her eagerness to go into the arms of Shiva, Menaka cursed her, saying that she would always be as fickle as water. So Ganga got converted into water and took shelter in the *kalumandal* of Brahma from where she later emerged as the celestial river. From here onwards, there are a number of variations. According to one

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account she issued in four directions as Sita, Alaknanda, Chakshu and Bhadra. Another story tells us that she got divided into three parts: the Alaknanda in *Swarga*, the Bhagirathi or the *Jahnavi* on Earth and the Adho-Ganga in *Patal*. And that is not the end. According to yet another account, she was brought out of the vessel of Brahma by the *Sapta Rishi* and emerged out into seven channels as Vasviksara, Nalini, Saraswati, Sita, Pavani, Suckakshu and Ganga.

The Ganga debouches at Hardwar where two annual fairs are held: the *Magh mela* in January-February and the *Ganga Dussehra* on *Shukla dashami* falling in June. The *Magh mela* lasts from the time of the entrance of the sun in *Makar* (Capricorn) to the time it leaves this constellation and enters *Kumbha* (Aquarius). The *kumbha mela* is held when the Sun enters Capricorn simultaneously with *Shukra* (Jupiter) entering Aquarius. This happens once in about 12 years and the dates are proclaimed by the astrologers. The festival lasts 19 days. On an average four to five million people converge at Hardwar. It costs four to five crore rupees and six months of preparations! The origin of *Kumbha* goes a long way back to the wars between the *devas* and *danavas*, when it was agreed to decide the issues by churning of the ocean. The churing first yielded *navratna* and then a *kumbha* or a pitcher containing *amrita*. The *devatas* entrusted the *kumbha* to the custody of Jayanta, the son of Indra. Jayanta assumed the form of *Garuda* and proceeded on his heavenly path. It took him 12 days to cover the journey from the sea to heaven. The *asuras* tried their best to get the *kumbha* and chased Jayanta all through the journey. At one time, whilst the *danavas* were trying to snatch the *kumbha* from Jayanta, four drops fell on the Earth; one each at Hardwar, Prayag, Nasik and Ujjain. At Hardwar, the drops of *amrit* fell in the Ganga at Brahma Kund. The *kumbha mela* is held in turns at the four above places. As for Ganga, the incident gave nectar like qualities to *Gangajal*.

The journey to Gangotri may will be started from Dharasu, Yamunotri or Barkot. The traveller may return to Dharasu from Yamunotri and then proceed on to Uttarkashy and beyond. However, for those who do not mind a little walk, there are a number of alternatives. From Yamunotri they may cross the Bamsaru pass and reach Sukhi or Jhala in the valley of Bhagirathi. Fine views of the snow and a number of encounters with the denizens of the wild—the snow-cock, *monal*, *barhal*, *serow* and even bears are seen. The journey takes three days for a party who are slow and steady. Fast walking, which is hardly advisable may take two days. A less adventurous traveller may retrace his steps along the road and turn left at a number of places. Kharsali, Gangnani, Simli and so on. Our destination is Uttarkashy. It is a pleasant walk of about seventeen to twenty kilometres and offers unique scenic beauty. There are jungles of rhododendron on the way. There is a plan to construct a link road between Barkot and Uttarkashy over Rari-ka-Danda (2,525 metres) to cut out the distance for *yatris*. The area of Singkote en route also offers another experience.

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This belt is one of the very few in Uttarakhand having dim dam files. Depending on the time and place of start, it takes one to two days to reach Uttarkashy.

Uttarkashy is almost a duplicate of Kashi or Varanasi. Till 1962, the town formed a part of Tehri district. There is a belief that in the second millenium of *kaliyug*, Kashi will get submerged in water and Uttarkashy will replace it.

The beautiful small town is situated between two rivers, the Varana and the Ashi and lies at a height of about 1,558 metres. The two tributary streams join Bhagirathi on either side of the town. The temples and *ghats* have names almost identical to those in Varanasi. The most important temple dedicated to Shiva is called Shri Vishwanath or *Sukh-ka-mandir*. In a hall in front of the temple stands a magnificent *trishul*. The pedestal is one metre in circumference and is made of copper; it supports a trident four metres long. Each prong is about two metres in length. It is one of the important monuments. There are other temples dedicated to Parasurama, Datatreya, Annapurna Devi, Kali, Bhairon, etc. It is said that at one time, there were 365 temples.

The ancient name of Uttarkashy is 'Barahat' meaning a big marketing place. It has a clue to its importance in the ancient times for it was a communication centre. According to one of the old accounts, the distance from Uttarkashy to Gangotri can be covered in seven days, to Yamunotri, five days, to Srinagar, six, and to Kedarnath, twelve days.

Another ancient name of Uttarkashy is Brahma Pura. Huen Tsang has referred to this place as Brahma Pura. Yet another name of Uttarkashy is Varanasi. The hill on which the town is situated has been referred as mount Varunavata in the *Skanda Purana*. Old scriptures give the name of the place situated at the holy confluence of rivers Bhagirathi, Varuna and Ashi as Varanasi. It is also conjectured that the name Barahat is a degenerated from of Varunavata.

Uttarkashy is also referred to as Saumya Kashy. The story goes that Renuka, the wife of Rishi Jamadagni got enamoured with Krtavirya, an eminent warrior. Jamadagni got wind of this and flew into a rage. He asked his eldest son to behead Renuka but he declined. Jamadagni, then asked his second son Parasurama who immediately obeyed the command of his father. Jamadagni was very pleased and asked Parsurama to demand a boon. Parasurama asked for forgiveness of his mother Renuka who was accordingly revived. Throughout the above incident, Parsurama was unperturbed and serene. Seeing this tranquility of behaviour, Rishi Jamadagni named the place of occurrence of the above incident as Saumya Kashy. The temple of Parsurama stands at the spot where the above incident took place.

Uttarkashy has a number of *ashrams* for *sanyasis* and mendicants. Its peace has a peculiar attraction for mendicants. After the First War of

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Independence, a number of freedom fighters escaped the tyranny of the British soldiers and took shelter on the banks of the Bhagirathi. The elders say that a special building, was constructed to house these warriors. The same is now being used as an Inspection House.

Before proceeding further, one may visit Dondi Tal, a beautiful lake set in charming surroundings at a distance of about 25 kilometres from Uttarkashy. Flowers of various hues grow wild on the banks of this lake. It is rich in fish including trout. The route to Dondi Tal can be covered on a mule and up to a certain distance even vehicles can be taken. The journey can be covered in one day. Anglers should take their tents or stay the night in village schools. Eatables are available and people are hospitable enough to offer them free. The river Ashi takes source from Dondi Tal.

Another place of interest in Uttarkashy is the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering which offeres training in basic as well as advanced courses in mountaineering. The institute has a collection of some very fine pieces of drift-wood. Quite a few of these exquisite carvings of nature will be seen by us on our way to Gangotri.

For the onward journey to Gangotri, we pass small villages of Gagori, Naitala and Maneri, the site of one of the stages of Tehri Dam project.

The first place of interest is Bhatwari at a distance of about 30 kilometres from Uttarkashy. The place is also named Bhaskar Prayag. It has an ancient Shiva temple dating back to the eighth century. Its construction is variously ascribed to King Sheel Verman and Surya which might well be the name of a Suryavanshi king. One of the old routes to Burha Kedar and Kedarnath emanates from Bhatwari. From here onwards, we enter a narrow valley with truncated spurs. We are passing through the gorge in the Great Himalayan Chain with Bander Poonchh on the left and Kedarnath to the right. It proves that Bhagirathi was in existence before the rise of the Great Himalayan Range. Fifteen kilometres ahead of Bhatwari is Gangnani with a hot spring on the left bank of Bhagirathi called Rishi Kund. The hot sulphur spring is reached by a suspension bridge. There is a beautifully located temple on the right bank. Moving on, at another 16 kilometres from Gangnani during which we cross and recross Bhagirathi, we come to the first major climb near village Sukhi. The valley has narrowed down to a mere gorge.

Sukhi is 3,000 metres above sea level. The old track from Yamunotri meets above Sukhi. It is an area which may well be converted into a National Park. Wild life is still plentiful but may be dying out fast. Here onwards we are literally in bear country. Sitting on the banks of Bhagirathi and scanning the area towards Dropadi-ka-Danda on the opposite bank, it is not very unusual to get glimpses of families of bears racing around trying to burn up excess energy. It is better to be equipped with binoculars and the best time to try your luck is early morning or before dusk. The bears frequently raid the maize and potato fields and apple orchards of the

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villagers. Of the gifts of nature, a mention has to be made of the mushrooms which grow here in plenty and are a favourite food of men and bears alike. All side nullahs in the valley from here onwards are full of pug-marks of bears of various ages. The occasional calls of the mountain goat and antelope are heard far and wide. The calm of the night is at times pierced by the cries of pheasants disturbed from sleep by the sneaky snow fox. Just before dawn, the jungle comes alive with calls of the *chir* pheasant and *monal*. After a fresh snowfall, a visit to Sukhi is an experience worth having. A number of animal trails criss-cross the whole area. Following them, one can actually bump into the animals or observe them from closer quarters.

Views from Sukhi are an admixture of all possible combinations available in the hills. Looking at the valley of the Bhagirathi towards Uttarkashy, it is a maze of spurs, one behind the other to the end of the sight. As we look to the left bank above the tree line there is a lush green meadow on a rolling slope known as Dropadi-ka-Danda. The origin of the name has been discussed previously. There are many other places laying claim to this and other events of the *Mahabharata*. In the adjoining district of Himachal, a place called Tandehi has a similar claim of having witnessed the demise of Dropadi, the wife of the Pandava princes. Every area is associated with the epics. That is their contribution to national unity. To the left and right are sheer cliffs with glittering nullahs and trees holding on to precarious ledges. It is a charming yet awe-inspiring sight. Right ahead, the view is bleak and austere. Over the blue-black and barren hills, rise the snow peaks of Dhauladhar Ranges on the boundary between Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

From Sukhi, the ascent lasts another three kilometres where we reach the highest point. Moving down, the valley at once opens out. The river gains in width and gets divided into a number of channels. The landscape has a beauty of its own. The jungle covered mountains rise like ogres in the white mist. As the road winds a village on the left bank comes in view. It is a model village in a jungle clearing. The lay-out is perfect in all details including the cattle sheds. The dark walls of the jungle close on all sides. There are no terraced fields around or any where in the vicinity and one wonders who lives there and how? A close scrutiny, however, reveals the village to be a mere illusion created by rocks with different colours giving the impression of sun and shade. One wonders at the architectural skill of nature. As per local tradition, it is the Pandavas' village for they stayed here during exile. The best view of village is obtained from the Jhala bridge.

Moving on, we enter a valley of untold charm, scenic beauty and repose. Very few places in the world are as pretty as the valley of Bhagirathi beyond Sukhi. Peaks with perennial snows glitter in the far distance. The valley is 2,660 metres high, 10 kilometres long and one to two kilometres

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broad. Harsil, a small village lies at the centre and the valley is some times called Harsil. The line of trees extends up to 4,500 metres which is the highest in Uttarakhand. The area is rich in flora and fauna. Looking up the course of the river, the eye rests on the snows of the Shir Kailash and Matri peaks. To the right is the beautiful peak of Shirkantha behind which lies Kedarnath. To the rear is Mount Bandar Poonch on the other side of which lies Yamunotri. With snow-capped peaks all around, a profusion of greenery and crystal-clear, rushing streams, the scene is something out of this world.

Harsil is a driftwood collector's paradise. Trees are plentiful in the upper reaches of Bhagirathi and her main tributary, Jahnavi. Roots and branches get dislodged and brought down by the rivers. On the downward journey they get smoothened and shaped into fantastic figures. Driftwood selection at best is a matter of imagination. But if you are a collector, Harsil is your Eden.

During our visit to Yamunotri, we had come across a government rest house at Dharasu constructed by Mr. Wilson. There is another imposing wooden structure named after him at Harsil. Circumstances under which Mr. Wilson, came to this country are not known. He however came to this valley with the permission of the raja of Tehri. He married a girl from Dharali, a village on our way up. She was a Bhotia woman with great charm. Her photograph along with the photograph of Mr. Wilson is displayed in the Wilson Hut, constructed in 1864. It is an imposing building with an apple orchard in front. The walls are made of alternating blocks of stones and logs of wood. These walls are crackproof and can withstand lashing of rains and battering by earthquakes. The inhabitants of the valley have started following this method of construction with great advantage. The Wilson Hut is now used as the forest rest house. It also houses the police post and in fact provides shelter to many. Mr. Wilson invested less in personal indulgence and more in the general good. He introduced potatoes in the valley which are now the chief cash crop and are exported in large quantities to the plains. The local tradition goes that Mr. Wilson worked round-the-clock to plant the trees and nurse them. His name here is synonymous with quality. A Wilson rope, the Wilson Hut or a Wilson bridge, all stand for items of high quality. He was the first to introduce transportation of wood through the river. It was due to him that the forest revenue of Tehri state (eight lakhs rupees only) slowly rose to 45 lakhs and later to over a crore.

The name Harsil is derived from *Hari-shila*, meaning the place where Hari sat for meditation. Hari, is one of the very popular names of Vishnu. It is believed that Hari himself came to this place after the descent of Ganga and did *tapasya* for thanksgiving. Laxmi Narayan Temple adorns the site where Hari sat for *tapasya*.

Harsil is invariably lashed by a strong wind between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m.

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The trees whirl and whiz before this manifestation of the power of elements. Popular belief, however, has that Vayu, the ruler of winds, comes regularly to pay homage to Hari who still dwells in the valley. There are three holy *prayags* at Harsil. The rivers Hari Ganga and Nil Ganga from the Dhauladhar Ranges come from right and Gupta Ganga, taking source from Shrikantha descends from the left. Three holy *prayags* are called Hari Prayag, Shyam Prayag and Gupta Prayag.

Harsil is a little valley of flowers in its own rights. Varieties that seem to flourish here are the cosmos, the calendula and the sun flower. Harsil also has its own ghost. On a night when the snow fell mercilessly and the blizzard raged, a Sikh soldier was buried under snow. On similar nights, he is now heard telling the wayfarers to move under shelters!

An old route from Harsil to Kedarnath goes through Gupta Ganga. It is said to be a very difficult trek and is believed to have been taken only by the *sadhus* of old. No one seems to have tried it for years now. If you have a good map and a strong will, it could be fun. This route emerges at Vasuki Tal, a lake near Kedarnath.

There is also a mountain route to Simla in Himachal Pradesh which takes about six days. The track goes through Hari Ganga, another name of which is Jalandhari Gad. It is here that the fight between Lord Shiva and the demon Jalandhara took place. (See 'Birth of the Himalayas.') There is a fairly well defined track up to about 15 kilometres and then everything gets lost in the maze of stony waste. We pass through a jungle of flourishing *Bhojpatra* trees. They valley of Hari Ganga is bear country. One should therefore, not venture this side alone or even in smaller groups of two or three. The landscape has the beauty of a dream. Perennial glaciers and ice bridges are encountered on the third day. Colourful flowers manage to grow on the glaciers in large numbers. The Lamkhaga pass is crossed on the fourth day. At the foot of the pass, there is a lake of about 400 metres by 100 metres. It is locally called *Pari Talab* since the *apsaras* are believed to bathe in it. It is only on the fourth or fifth day that the first village Chhitkul, situated in the picturesque Baspa valley, is reached. Moving further, some links roads for onward journeys to Sangla, Pooh and Simla, can be seen. This route was once well frequented. People from Himachal trekked to Gangotri and shrines of Kedarnath and Badrinath through this pass. In fact one of the *rajas* of Tehri got some stone markers erected which are still in existence. The route was also used by the *yogis* from Uttarakhand to visit Kinner Kailash. The route is now used by the Gaddi graziers and shepherds. A number of grazier huts and sangarhs are encountered which may be used to advantage. For adventure and fun, there could hardly be a better trek.

Travelling further to Gangotri, we come to the village Dharali situated near the confluence of the Bhagirathi and the Dudha Ganga, a river descending from Mount. Shrikantha. Gazing up the valley of Dudha Ganga, one

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sees the beautiful Shrikantha peak. Bhagirath is said to have gone to Shrikantha to persuade Shiva to receive Ganga on his locks. It appear that the old village or at least parts of it got engulfed by a landslide. An excavation reportedly financed by Shri G.D. Birla, the eminent industrialist has unearthed an old temple of Lord Shiva.

On the opposite side of the Bhagirathi lies the village Mushimath or Mukhva. During winter, when Gangotri is covered with a thick sheet of snow, the idol of Ganga is brought to this place and worshipped at a temple called Markandeya Ashram.

From Dharali, we may look back to get a clear view of Mount Bandar Poonchh. The Bumser pass is to the left. As we can now see, this valley is really the centre of communications. We can reach Yamunotri, Kinner Kailash, Gangotri and Kedarnath. All you need is guts and a grim determination. As we proceed, we shall see that we can even reach Badrinath and, of course, Tibet. So let us get going. About seven kilometres from Dharali is Jangla where we again cross Bhagirathi over to the right bank. A little beyond at Lanka is the confluence of Jahnavi with Bhagirathi. The rivers have cut gorges of marvellous depth and swirl between rocky walls rising thousands of feet. Rishi Jahnu's *ashram*, which was ravaged by Ganga when it rushed down, was located here. Jahnavi has its own story to tell. She was a cousin of Parvati and secretly adored Mahadeva. Her longing grew day by day. Seeing Mahadeva and Parvati together she too longed for Mahadeva's love. Consumed by passion, she one day clung to Mahadeva's knees. Shiva realized the depth of her love and gave her a place in his heart.

Lanka is the present roadhead. The Jahnavi has to be crossed on foot over a suspension bridge. The track for reaching the river is about one kilometre long and there is a gradual descent passing through a number of *deodar* trees. On the other side, we ascend for about a kilometre to Bhairon Ghati. A clear view of the *prayag* is obtained from the bridge. The Jahnavi has comparatively clearer water with a bluish tinge whereas the Bhagirathi is silt saturated with a dingy hue. The scenery in the *deodar* forests and rising pinnacles is very beautiful.

First steel suspension bridge over Jahnavi was constructed by a forest officer, Mr. O. Callaghan, some time in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was about 125 metres long and 150 metres above the water. A new road bridge is now under construction at the same place. When ready, it will be the highest bridge from the water level in whole of India. After crossing the present suspension bridge, we see a huge rock called Bhairon Shila with the Bhairon temple in its shelter. People burn incense here before proceeding further.

From the Bhairon Ghati, we can again get into a bus. Some enterprising men dismantled two buses, took them across and reassembled them. These buses keep plying between Bhairon Ghati and Gangotri.

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The temple of Bhairon at Bhairon Ghati was constructed by the famous Gorkha General, Amar Singh Thapa. This benevolent soldier also got the track repaired. The temple at Gangotri was also constructed by his orders.

As we move from Bhairon Ghati, the distant glimpses of snow-clad mountains instil a feeling of reverence for the Himalayas. To the right is the Bhagirathi, gay and tumbling among the hills sloping upwards as far as the sight goes. Everything is fresh and green. A little further, the valley opens out near a level spot. It is said the Pandavas performed a great *Ashvamedha yajna* here. Distant spurs subside into lengthened sweeps of *deodar* and *bhoj*. The seething Bhagirathi laps the banks fiercely as it rushes down. A little further down we get the first glimpse of Gangotri Puri with its many *ashrams* and *dharamsalas*.

The Ganga is not a river of North India only; it has equal following in the south. The mythological legend of Bhagirath is reproduced on a hill near Kanchipuram. The inscription is ascribed to the Rajas, Mahendra Verma and Narsingh Verma of the early seventh century. The legend is reproduced on a huge rock face of 19 metres by 14 metres. The Ganga is depicted descending with Raja Bhagirath through various stages of *tapasya*. It is because of this marco-appeal of Ganga that Pandet Nehru preferred to call her as the 'River of India'.

The bathing ghat is located near the temple at Gangotri. The area is generally marked by two saffron-coloured flags. The river is about 13 metres wide and approximately one metre deep. The current is too strong to be safe. The water is almost saturated with silt. A look around would reveal that an intersection of all the provinces is met at Gangotri. Our forefathers selected the religious places well; our mythology displays a rare wealth of coded knowledge and our shrines are the living examples of our basic unity of faith transcending all diversities of language and living patterns. Devotees take water from Gangotri and offer it at Rameswaram. The sands from Rameswaram are brought in a coconut shell to be immersed at Gangotri. It is one nation in spite of its diversity.

There is no doubt that the temple is as old as Hindu civilisation and historically, it is not possible to determine when the first shrine was built. It is, however, believed that the ancient temple was a wooden structure and was destroyed by an avalanche. The new one was built by the orders of Amar Singh Thapa. The short rule of the Gorkhas in Uttarakhand saw the revival and improvement of many temples. The Gorkhas also made arrangements for free meals to the pilgrims. The name of Amar Singh Thapa will always be held in high esteem. The working of his mind is revealed by an interesting letter written by him on 2nd March 1915 to the King of Nepal.

"When the Chinese army invaded Nepal we implored the mercy of heaven by offerings to Brahmins and the *performance of religious ceremonies** and through the favour of one and the intercession of the other we succeeded in repelling the enemy. Ever since you confiscated the *jagirs* of the Brahmins,

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thousands have been in distress and poverty. Promises were made that they should be restored at the capture of Kangra, and orders to this effect under the red seal were addressed to me and Nain Singh Thapa. We failed, however, in that object, and now there is a universal commotion. You ought therefore to assemble all the Brahmins and promise to restore to them their lands and property, in the event of your conquering and expelling the English. By these means many thousands of respectable Brahmins will put up their prayers for your protection and the enemy will be driven forth. *By the practice of charity*, the terrritory acquired in four generations may be preserved *and, through the favour of God*, our power and dominion may be still further extended."*

We therefore see that a highly contorted picture of the rule of Gorkhas was presented by those with vested interests.

The temple built by Amar Singh was damaged by a rock fall and repaired at the expense of the Raja of Jaipur. The *garbha griha* or the sanctum sanctorum is approximately six and a quarter metres square. In the centre is the icon of Ganga which is about half a metre tall. A little lower are the images of Laxmi, Saraswati, Annapurana, Bhagirathi, Yamuna and Jahnavi. The images of Shankaracharya and even Ganesh are kept at times.

The *shila* where Bhagirath did *tapasya* is to the left of the temple at a distance of about 16 metres under an open canopy. *Shraddhs* are performed at Bhagirath *shila* when *Gangajal* is invariably offered to Bhishma Pitamaha.

It is a well known fact that *Gangajal* keeps fresh for many years. It may be because of the presence of minerals and essence of herbs or just a divine miracle that *Gangajal* has the quality of killing bacteria and remain fresh for years. The water is also considered to have medicinal properties. Maharishi Charak, the founder father of Ayurveda, has recommended *Gangajal* for old age debility and other similar ailments. There have been numerous experiments by western scientists to test the properties of *Gangajal* which have almost invariably resulted in the affirmation of its unusual purity. *Gangajal* is put in the mouth of a dying man to revive him or else purify his soul. It is a common custom at Gangotri to have a bath and then offer *Gangajal* to Bhishma Pitamaha at Bhagirath *shila*.

Gangotri is situated at the confluence of the Bhagirathi and the Kedar Ganga (21° × 75°—57′) in Uttarkashy district at a height of 3,200 metres. There are high mountains on all sides and therefore, unlike Harsil, the wind is never too strong. On the left bank are mainly the *ashrams* of the *sadhus* whereas to the right are the temples and a small marketing place with makeshift huts. All necessities are available. There is a wooden bridge over the Bhagirathi as well as the Kedar Ganga. These were constructed under the supervision and at the expense of the Gangotri Temple Com-

**Himalayan Districts*, II, pp. 694-695

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mittee which was organized by *muniji* of Yoga Niketan, Rishikesh, and Rishi Vyas Deva of Uttrakashy. Many of the ascetics brave the rigours of winter and stay on at Gangotri Puri. Some of them are eminent scholars of Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy. Peace and inner happiness glow on their faces.

About hundred metres downstream from the temple is Gauri Kund where the Bhagirathi falls into a huge natural trough. It is believed that when Bhagirath was directing the course of Ganga, it started flowing towards *Patal*. Lord Shiva intervened and checked the flow. The place where this happened is called Gauri Kund. The fall is about seven metres and named Sahasradhara. The area in front of the fall is called Brahma Kund. Gauri Kund is about eight metres in diameter. It is also believed that Gauri, the daughter of Himavat had meditated at this place to win the affections of Shiva. There is a natural autogenous Shiva *linga* in Gauri Kund. With a bit of luck, this can be seen during winter. It is in Gauri Kund that devotees from the south offer water and sand brought from Rameswaram.

The area to the rear of Gauri Kund is called Patangana or Patangani. It is here that the Pandavas stayed for 12 years when in exile. It is also here that the Pandavas performed the *Ashwamedh Yajna*.

The mythological background of Ganga Dussehra has been given above. The pageantry of colour on this day at Gangotri is worth seeing. It was on a Wednesday (*Budhwar*) that Ganga had descended; giving rise to the proverb '*budh, kam shuddh*', meaning any work started on *Budhwar* is sure to succeed.

The shrine is open from May 1 to October 31 and so does the post office. After that, the icon of Ganga is taken to Mukhwa and only the real *sadhus* remain here. Gangotri records about one to two metres of snowfall in winter. All the birds except the snow cock migrate downwards to the area of Sukhi. A pair of crows, however, remains in Gangotri and keeps company with *sadhus*. Many *yogis* claim to have seen this pair of birds for years. As for *sadhus*, I once asked some about their life during winter. '*Shanti aur swachhata*' (peace and purity) was the answer. Devotees leave enough staple food for them. Of fuel, there is no dearth. Vegetables are provided by the jungles. Mushrooms grow in plenty and are plucked and dried for winters. Nothing is wanting.

The rates for *arati* as in 1974 are given at the end of this chapter. Should there be any *arati* rates? Is not every one equal in the eyes of God? These are the questions which are frequently asked. That is one aspect of public opinion. Others feel that in the eyes of God, all are equal and in case a man is capable of offering a greater amount and does not, is not he a defaulter? In the eyes of the Almighty, an offering of a flower and a brick of gold are the sáme. Since money is now utilized for the greatest good of the greatest numbers, why should the rich not contribute more?

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Anyway, let these materialistic overtones not bother you. Let us not disturb the peace and tranquility of mind at this beautiful shrine. Let us now proceed on.

From Gangotri one can attempt to reach Gaumukh and be back in two days. The distance is about 23 kilometres and the climb is gradual. However, the tree line is left at about 14 kilometres from Gangotri and effects of rarefied atmosphere put a strain on the lungs. Moreover, it is too much to go and come back in one day. The weather in the higher regions is ever changing and it is always advantageous to have spare time for an emergency.

The track to Gaumukh was constructed in 1967-68 and is all along the right bank of the Bhagirathi. As we move on, the trees become fewer in number but the flowers go on increasing in variety and profusion. Wild roses, white and pink in colour are seen flourishing in all nooks and side valleys. For the first one or two kilometres, we come across a number of *ashrams* nestling along the bank of the Bhagirathi. The sites are well chosen. Some fruit trees and vegetable gardens, mainly potatoes and peas, invariably accompany the *ashrams*. About two kilometres from the shrine is Lakshmiban—where some fruit trees grow wild. At the second kilometre, there is the *garbha yoni*. It is to the left of the river and you have no access to it from this side. There are two huge adjacent rocks, so close that there is hardly place to wriggle in and out. It is believed that anyone with impure thoughts cannot pass through At the eleventh kilometre, we come across the first halting place, Cheer Bas, a jungle of pine trees. This is the highest area where pines are found and they have given their name to the place (*cheer*-pine, *bas*-places of). Cheer Bas is located in a broad valley at a height of 3,940 metres. There is a small forest rest house at Cheer Bas. On the opposite bank of Bhagirathi lay the former route between Gangotri and Gaumukh. One old *dharamsala* built by Seth Raghunandan Das of Moradabad is located there. Some utensils are also kept and are utilized by the *yatris* and *sadhus* treading the left bank. It is good to halt the first day at Cheer Bas. One can in fact start from Gangotri after morning prayers and breakfast and reach Cheer Bas for afternoon tea or late lunch.

In case this *yatra* to Gaumukh be performed in early May, you can still come across huge ice fields and seasonal glaciers. One advantage of proceeding on this trip in May is that you are almost sure to encounter some wildlife on their yearly migration upwards. Morning at Cheer Bas has its own charm. The light reflected from the snow peaks fills the whole valley with brightness and heralds the day-break much before time. The first rays of the light seem to come with imperceptible stealth. Snow peaks take on a bolder tone. Casting off the veil of night, they display the full beauty of their curves in an extraordinarily subtle way. Suddenly it is day.

From Cheer Bas, Bhuj Bas is another seven kilometres. Wild flowers

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now grow in greater profusion. The area between Cheer Bas and Bhuj Bas is called Pushpa Bas, an area of flowers. Many herbs also grow. Aconite belladonna, arnica and calendula grow abundantly. There is also a tiny creeper with a root named *thuma* which is considered an effective aphrodisiac. Many foreign scholars have admitted the superiority of the Ayurvedic system. Professor Angelo Viziano has paid glowing tributes to the use of vegetable products by the Indian *vaids* for curing even insanity and diabetes. One interesting herb growing here is called *hathajari*. The root of this herb looks exactly like a clenched fist and hence the name. It is a sweet tasting root and effective in stomach ailments and food poisoning. Another interesting herb is the *rudravantijari* or the weeping herb. It is a flowering herb with plentiful small golden yellow flowers. It is believed to be a panacea for many ailments. A viscous substance oozes out from its stem like oil from pines. These are called the tears of the herb. It is said to weep because its healing properties are not made full use of. Many of these herbs are now being used by various modern firms to produce quality goods like *Liv 52*, *Tentex forte* and so on. There is a herb with fluorescent roots that shine with a bluish light at night. Your guide may point this out to you. It is locally called *deepjari*. Mahakavi Kalidas has also referred to *Deepjari* in his play, *Kumar Sambhav*. The capital of Himalaya, Aushadhi Prast is described to be having *deepjari* growing on all sides. Similar bushes are also found in Arunachal Pradesh.

Bhuj Bas is an open field about two kilometres, by one kilometre situated on the right bank of Bhagirathi. Gaumukh is clearly visible from here and the reasons of its being so called are also evident. The valley towards the glacier is like the face of a huge cow with the horns represented by the sister Mounts Bhagirathi 1, 2 and 3 and the mouth by the snout of the glacier. Bhuj Bas, as the name indicates is a jungle of *bhojpatra* trees. There is a hut of *sadhus* which was built by Swami Raghunath Dasji who stayed on in the area around Gangotri for more than thirty five years. As we approach Bhuj Bas, the peak Shivlinga displays all its beauty and seems to be touching the very skies.

Bhojpatra trees yield excellent bark which was used for all writing purposes till the discovery of paper. The Aryans used *bhojpatra* for writing of scriptures. Old trees are called *Brahma bhoj*. The older the tree, the better the bark. Bhotias claim that grain kept wrapped in *bhojpatra* can stay fresh for about twenty-five years. *Bhojpatra* is considered to be an item of utmost purity. People keep it in temples and give it to their daughters at wedding. We are now at a height of 4,145 metres and *bhojpatra* is the only tree that grows at this height. *Sadhus* manage to grow some potatoes and peas also for use during the long and bleak winters. As we look around, we also notice the juniper bushes. These are called *thalujhari* in the local dialect. Growing about 35 centimetres in height, the bush spreads around like a thick meshed net. The oil content in its

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wood is quite high and it burns while wet. The wood has a sweet aroma and forms the base for the incense industry. The bush bark is also used in brewing country liquor.

The weather at Bhuj Bas is generally clear except in the afternoon when some clouds invariably descend in the valley and result in mild rain. There is a popular belief that the day it does not rain in this part, will be the doomsday. When the mists lift, the deep velvety blue of the skies forms an excellent background to the mountains. Bhuj Bas offers enchanting views of Bhrighupanth, Shivlinga and Bhagirathi Sisters. The soft breeze has a unique quality of refreshing tired people. Some *sadhus* are known to have stayed on at Bhuj Bas even during winter with two to three metres of snow. Swami Narhari has been a permanent resident here since 1965.

Personally I am not a believer in miracles but we all know that they do occur. Once I was on a visit to Gaumukh and beyond to Badrinath. (See Himal Parikarma). I halted at Bhuj Bas to pay my respects to the Swami. He was in *samadhi* and innate peace shone from his face. It was a sacrilege to disturb him. I decided to wait. After about one hour, he opened his eyes and acknowledged our *namaskar*. He had magnetic eyes. The first few words he uttered, "So you are going for a *Himavat parikrama*. Pray to God and you will be successful." We were wonder-struck since we had not disclosed our plans to any one. Our trek envisaged negotiating the difficult pass Kalindi Khal and crossing of 11 glaciers. Swamiji again addressed us and said, "I will give you a gift of Gaumukh. I will brew some Gaumukhi tea for you." He then looked at me and said, "You take less sugar." I was again taken aback since very few except my close associates would know that I have not got a very sweet tooth. All tales of miracles remind me of the above incident.

Another incident involving another army colonel on a shikar trip is described by Herbert Tichy in his book *Tibetan Adventure—Travels through Afghanistan, India and Tibet*, "Tiger," said the old Colonel, "I really don't believe in yogis and miracles and so forth. Here in India things runs along natural lines just as they do in our own old continent, though possibly with rather more of a flourish. But," and his voice grew thoughtful, "I did have one experience which I have never been able to explain satisfactorily. I had pitched my tent somewhere in the middle of a jungle that was full of game. On the very first day there I noticed that the servants seemed apprehensive. At first I could not get them to speak, but at last they told me that a *yogi* lived in the neighbourhood who had taken the animals in that forest under his protection. And they were afraid lest he should do some mischief to me or them."

"Next morning I sent my two servants to the nearest village to replenish our dwindling store of provisions. I myself proceeded in the opposite direction towards my shooting platform, I had several days been on the tracks of a large tiger. This time I was lucky. The beast showed himself

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and ate part of the previous day's kill. It was an absolutely dead shot. I took careful aim and fired. But the only sound was the click of the hammer and the cartridge misfired. I was using a double barrelled gun, so I quickly fired the second barrel, but with the same result. The tiger had heard the sounds and put up his head uneasily, but finally returned to his meal. Noiselessly I put in fresh cartridges and pulled the trigger for the third time. Another misfire. The beast, now thoroughly alarmed, vanished into the tall jungle grass with a single bound."

"For years I had been using the same brand of cartridges and up till then never had a misfire. I went back to camp in a furious temper several hours before the servants returned from the village. When they did get back, they told me excitedly that the villagers had told them that I had made three attempts to fire on a beast in the jungle but that the Yogi had protected it. And that the Yogi would continue to protect his animals . . ."

"To this day it is a mystery to me and will always be one how the people in that village fifteen miles away could know at the same moment that I fired shots, that they were unsuccessful. I spent another week in the neighbourhood but never saw either the Yogi or another tiger."

Returning to our own account the Swami brought out some flowers and put them in the boiling water. A sweet aroma filled the air. The brew looked and tasted like tea. The Swami told us the properties of the Gaumukhi tea. He claimed that it was a sure remedy for asthama. In the higher regions, it supplemented the body heat and above all was an aid to the functions of the heart which had to work faster in rarefied atmosphere. As asked by the Swami we took our pulse rates before and half an hour after the tea. From an average of 140 beats per minute, the heart had come to normal !

Continuing our journey, as we proceed along a few hundred metres ahead of Bhuj Bas, the glacier comes into view. We pass through a vast bed of candytufts and then slowly trudging along at last reach Gaumukh. The Bhagirathi emerges from underneath the snout with full force. The stream is about one metre deep and 15 metres broad at the narrowest. The river is not fordable anywhere from the very source down to its delta. To one side the Shivlinga stands like a sentinel. The rugged grandeur of these mountains, makes the soul at once aware of the supernatural. The insignificance of man becomes doubly pronounced. These beautiful mountains have watched countless men come and go. The process will go on.

An evening at Gaumukh is a pleasant experience. The setting sun converts the peaks into molten gold which lingeringly fades into pink and steel grey. Moonrise gives an eerie chill to the valley. Slowly the moonlight lends a peculiar charm to the snows transforming the shapes of the rugged peaks by softening their contours. The view is too lovely for words. The roar of the Bhagirathi is the only sound. You are face to face with the eternal and the mysterious. The sky glitters and quivers with stars. Sud-

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denly a crashing sound disturbs the peace of the still night. Woken up from your sleep, you move out of your tent to investigate. The sound echoes and re-echoes in the surrounding hills sending a chill through your body and transporting you to the world of the supernatural. Relax. The sound is caused by chunks of snow falling into the river. Look to the hillsides and you notice some light in the distant mountains. Strain your ears and you can also hear the faint barking of the dogs. These are not the ghosts and goblins. These are the shepherds and graziers who lead a lonely yet fascinating life in the high Alps. In the early morning, their flute charms the valleys.

The valley of the Bhagirathi or more appropriately of the ancient glaciers is about a kilometre broad here. The glacier is half a kilometre wide and 100 metres high. This huge mass of ice can vacillate during winter, depending on the force of avalanches and get slightly shifted from the place of previous years. The Gangotri glacier is about 30 kilometres and the longest in Uttarakhand. It starts from Badrinath peaks. On the opposite side of the same peaks start the Vishnu Ganga, the other arm of Ganga. So near, yet so far.

At no time of the year are you likely to be lonely in your journey to Gaumukh. Apart from the saints and sages, a cross section of India's population is met here. A majority of them are people from Bengal and Gujarat. It is a tribute to the sway of *Snatan Dharma* that some times even the old and infirm are seen trudging along with devotion and determination. One is filled with reverence at the depth of their faith and at the wisdom of the ancestors who fostered the unity of India by such ostentatious expressions of faith.

Leaving this lush valley, let us now proceed on our further travels in this beautiful 'Valley of Gods'. This valley of green river land, velvety hills, lovely flowers, breeze singing through pines under the shade of the snow topped mountains will beckon you again. It will be difficult to resist the call.

PUJA LIFE MEMBERSHIP RATES

Devotees are to intimate the days on which *puja* should be performed every year :

		Rs.
1.	Mahabhoga	4500.00
2.	Khirabhoga/Balabhoga	3000.00
3.	Abhisheka	3000.00

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4.	Sahasranam	600.00
5.	Sutak Archana	300.00
6.	Ganga Lahiri Patha	200.00
7.	Swarna Arati	500.00
8.	Bhagwana Arati	100.00

PUJA RATES

		Rs.
1.	Maha Abhisheka	501.00
2.	Abhisheka	251.00
3.	Ganga Lahiri Patha	25.00
4.	Ganga Sahasranama Patha	15.00
5.	Geeta Patha	51.00
6.	Sutaka Patha	25.00
7.	Panch Upachar	51.00
8.	Devi Sutak Patha	15.00
9.	Ratri Sutak Patha	15.00
10.	Swarna Arati	31.00
11.	Chandi Arati (big)	12.00
12.	Chandi Arati (small)	7.00
13.	Karpur Arati	3.00
14.	Atka Sadharana	25.00
15.	Atka Vishesha	51.00
16.	Pind Prasada	2.00
17.	Bhoga	6.00
18.	Jeerna-uddhara	2.00
19.	One day's Puja	142.32
20.	Balabhoga	21.00
21.	Akhand Jyoti	36.00
22.	Month of Savan Puja	501.00
23.	Dussehra Parva Utsava	301.00
24.	Janma Ashtami	400.00
25.	Navarati Shat Chandi	751.00
26.	Deepamalika Utsava	251.00
27.	Veda Patha	101.00

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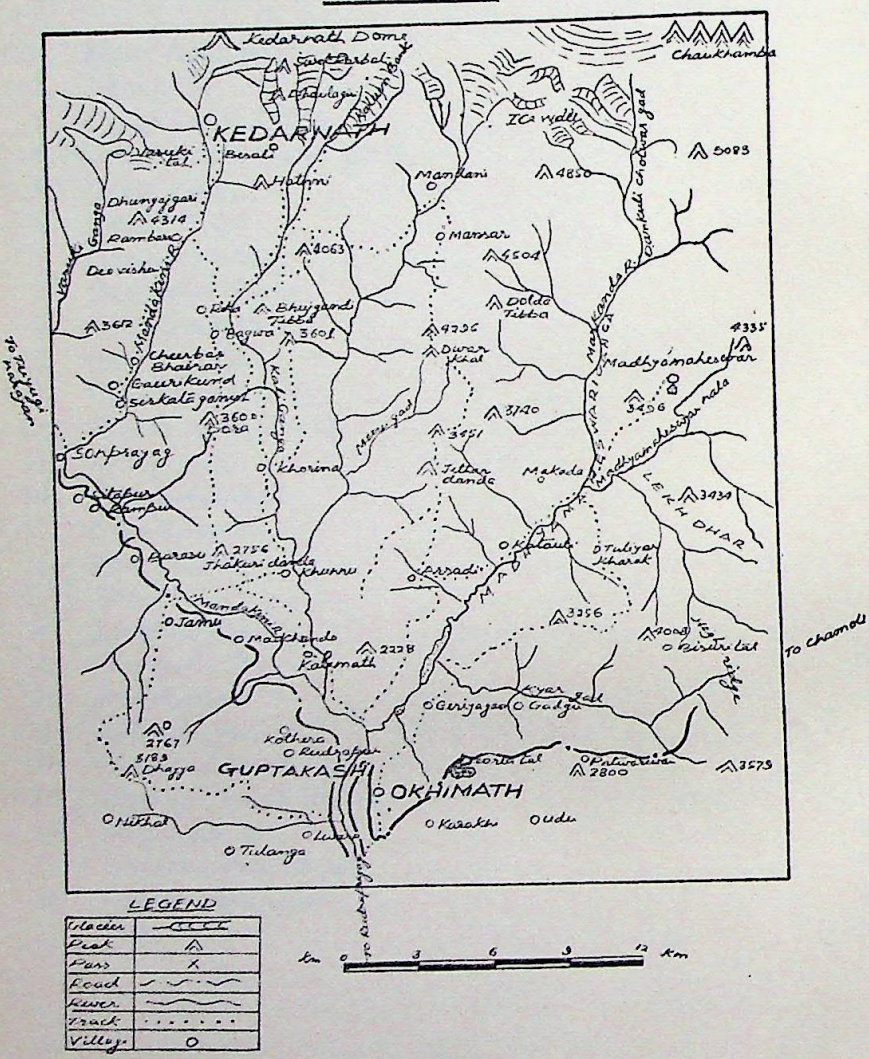
KEDARNATH



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17

Kedarnath

IN THE *Puranas* and other ancient scriptures, the name of Garhwal appears as Kedarkhand, the region of Shiva. A common saying in Uttarakhand is '*Jitne kankar, utne Shankar*', meaning that there are as many temples of Shiva as there are stones in Kedarkhand. There are indeed a countless number of temples of Shiva, the famous ones being Panch Kedar, Someshwar, Jageshwar, Bagheshwar, Baleshwar, Mukteshwar and so on. As a general rule, a temple ending with '*eshwar*' signifies a Shiva temple. It has been a common practice to construct the temples of Shiva and add own names to them. A temple called Deep Chandeshwar would thus mean a temple of Shiva constructed by Deep Chand, Tuka Rameshwar, a temple constructed by Tuka Ram and so on.

Badrinath and Kedarnath are the names of two famous peaks adjacent to each other serving as the residences of Vishnu and Shiva. At one time, even Badrinath belonged to Shiva. It is believed that Shiva and Gauri resided in the valley of rivers Vishnu Ganga and Saraswati. The *Shrimad Bhagwat* lays down that Vishnu assumed the form of a child and asked Gauri for protection. She agreed and approached Shankar. Shankar knew the real identity of the child and cautioned her. Parvati was insistent and had her way. After some time, leaving the child at Badrinath, the celestial couple went to Mansarovar for a bath. On return they found the doors closed on them and Shankar had to shift his residence to Kedarnath.

According to a different version, Vishnu who had earlier meditated in the area of Badrinath as Narayan along with his devotee Nar, requested Shiva to shift to the next hill. Mahadeva agreed. Vishnu was, therefore, pleased to declare that anyone desirous of visiting him at Badrinath, must first pay a visit to Kedarnath and then come to his shrine at Badrinath. The system has been followed ever since.

Kedarnath is the incarnation of Lord Shiva called Sadashiva. Before proceeding further, it is essential to know how Shiva came to be called Mahadeva. In the great Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, Duryodhan relates

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how the gods went to Shiva in delegation and accosted him for help in their perpetual fights against the *danavas*. Shiva answered that he would give them half of his strength which should be enough for them to succeed. The gods, however, could not sustain even half of the strength of Shiva and in turn decided to surrender half of their combined strength to get Shiva on their side. Shiva became stronger than all the gods and came to be called 'Mahadeva,' the great Lord.

The present site of Kedarnath is ascribed to the era of the *Mahabharata*. Rishi Vyas told the Pandavas that they were charged with *gotra hatya* and could expiate their sins only through the worship of Mahadeva. The five brothers along with Dropadi came to Uttarakhand. They reached Rudra Prayag and had a glimpse of Mahadeva. Mahadeva, however, was unwilling to meet the murderers and fled towards Kedarnath. At Gupta Kashi, he became *gupta* (invisible) and hence the name of the town. The Pandvas came along and were about to discover Mahadeva's hiding place, but he assumed the form of a buffalo and dashed up to the hills. The Pandavas gave a hot chase. At Kedarnath, Shiva dived into the Earth and all but disappeared except the hinder parts which were above the ground and were caught by Bhim. The remaining portions of the body appeared at different places in the Himalayas and are worshipped as Panch Kedar; the *nabhi* at Madhyameshwar, the face at Rudranath the hands at Tunganath, and hair at Kalpeswar. The Pandavas were freed from their sin and established the Panch Kedar temples.

The origin of the worship of Pashupati Nath form of Shiva in Nepal is connected with this legend. The upper portion of the body of Shiva is believed to have surfaced at Mukhar Bind in Nepal, where it is now worshipped as Pashupati Nath. There is also a different version. In the *Linga Purana*, it is stated that Shiva was seen roaming the jungles of Himavat in the form of a deer. After he became Mahadeva, the entire universe was full with his light. Brahma went to the heavens to see how far the light stretched and Vishnu went to *Patal*. On return, Vishnu declared that he could not find the limits of Shiva's light. Brahma, however, claimed that he could not only locate the limits but travelled beyond them. Vishnu asked *Kamadhenu*, the celestial cow, for confirmation. She shook her tail in negation of Brahma's claim. The tail of the cow is, therefore, considered sacred and adorns the temples in the sanctum sanctorums. Shiva bestowed a boon on the cow that she would be worshipped by the Hindus and he would himself appear on Earth as Pashupati Nath. This he did in Kedarkhand to avoid the Pandavas.

Shiva can claim to be the oldest deity of the subcontinent with devotees all over the country. Prince Dharm Datt of Kanjeewaram in Tamil Nadu conquered Nepal from the Kirat rulers and built the original temple of Pashupati Nath. It is also interesting to note that Kedar is the name of the highest peak in the Purandhar hills near Pune and a temple of Shiva exists

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on the hill. Similar temples exist in Assam. Shiva is, therefore, symbol of national unity as he is worshipped all over the country.

For Kedarnath, the *yatra* starts at Rudra Prayag, the confluence of the Alaknanda and the Mandakini. Rudra Prayag is reached from Srinagar by road. The place derives its name from Rudra, one of the names of Shiva. It was here that the pride of Narad was humbled.

As the legend goes, Narad Muni became proud of his knowledge of music. His vauntings could not be tolerated any more. Shri Krishna, the all seeing, wanted to put an end to this concient. He told Narad that Mahadev and Parvati had heard of his praises and were eager to listen to him. The *Muni* at once got ready to proceed to Kedarkhand. Mahadeva saw this with the third eye. As Krishna and Narad reached Rudra Prayag, they met several pretty women each one of whom had a mutilated limb. Narad asked Krishna to tell him about the young ladies. Krishna in turn asked them. They all wailed loudly and said that they were the *ragas* and *raginis* and a *rishi* called Narad had badly mutilated them. Narad's pride was humbled. Krishna asked him to learn music from Mahadeva. The *muni* prayed for many years at Rudra Prayag. Mahadeva taught him the *veena*. It is believed that at night lilting tune of his *veena* are still heard by the real devotees.

There are various temples of Shiva and Annapurna Devi at Rudra Prayag. An iron chain has been fixed at the confluence where steps lead to the water. The current is very fast and due caution must be observed.

Rudra Prayag also refreshes the memory of the man-eating leopard there. The beast had unleashed a reign of terror in 700 sq kilometres of the area from 1918 to 1926 and had killed more than three hundred men before it was shot down by Jim Corbett. The leopard had the distinction of having been discussed in the British Parliament a number of times. The august body was closed for celebrations on the news of its death. The place where it was shot is just short of Rudra Prayag on the Srinagar road. A monument reading as under stands at the exact spot of its murder(!)

ON THIS VERY SPOT
WAS KILLED
THE MAN-EATING LEOPARD
OF
RUDRA PRAYAG
BY
JIM CORBETT
ON MAY 1 1926 AT 10 P.M.

The road to Kedarnath is along river Mandakini. The valley is enchantingly beautiful. The scenery is rugged and captivating. The first place of interest is a wide open plain called Agastya Muni where Agastya meditated.

Agastya belonged to the Aegean race, the fountainhead of Dravidians. The wise *muni* is believed to have been the first to have crossed the Vindhya-

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chal mountains and reached Kedarkhand to worship Shiva. Tamil, the predominant language of the south, was evolved by Agastya. The legend goes that at the time of Shiva's marriage to Parvati, all creatures of the world reached Kedarkhand. The Earth tilted towards the north and Shiva himself asked Agastya to go to south to restore the balance. The *muni* pounded down the Vindhyas; and reached Pothia which is also called Kailash of the south.

As we proceed along the road, we notice that we are in a valley of matchless scenic beauty and bracing climate. There is a profusion of wild flowers, candytufts, daisies, anemones and hordes of others. A glimpse of the resplendent face of Chaukhamba or Badrinath peak is first obtained at Silli.

The road passes through lush paddy fields with an appetising fragrance saturating the morning breeze. Moving along, we reach the road junction. For Kedarnath, we have to turn left and for Okhimath and Madhyamaheshwar, we proceed on. We shall first go across the Mandakini, start the climb and trace the steps of the Pandava princes in their quest of Lord Mahadeva.

The first major place after Agastya Muni is Gupta Kashi, a small town with a bazar on both sides of the road. It was here that Shiva disappeared for the Pandavas, thus giving the name Gupta Kashi to the place. It is believed that in the first part of *Kaliyug*, Kashi would be most sacred, in the second part, Uttarkashy and at the end, Gupta Kashi. The most famous temple at Gupta Kashi is of Shri Vishwanathji. In front of the temple, there is a small *kund* called Manikarnika. It is fed by two tributaries, one from a Ganesh head and other from a cow's head. One is called Ganga and the other Yamuna. It is believed that the water in them comes from Gangotri and Yamunotri. A dip in the pond is, therefore, considered as holy as at Prayag. Other temples at Gupta Kashi are Ardhanateshwar, Garur and Annapurna Devi. There is also a temple of Pandavas constructed at the spot where they stayed.

Descending from the bazar, at a distance of two kilometres, is the Kartik Swami Temple. Further down is village Bamsu, at a distance of four kilometres from Gupta Kashi. The ancient name of Bamsu was Shontipura. This was the scene of a battle between Aniruddha, the grandson of Krishna, and Banasur whose daughter Usha eloped with Aniruddha. The *Vishnu Purana* relates that Bali, the grandson of *daitya* Prahlad, had one hundred sons. Banasur was the eldest. He had a pretty daughter, Usha. She once saw Parvati and Shiva sporting together and wanted the love of a husband passionately. She prayed to Parvati who was pleased and said, "Do not despair, you shall have a husband. He, who shall appear to you in a dream on the twelfth of *Baisakh*, shall be your husband." Usha saw Aniruddha. With the help of her friend Chitralekha, Usha induced him to visit her. Banasur got wind that Aniruddha was in his palace. He captured the lover and imprisoned him. Krishna came to know and set out for the

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daitya city. A great battle ensued. Banasur and Krishna were both wounded. Krishna took out his *sudarshan chakra*. Bana invoked Shiva to save him from sure destruction. Shiva appeared and told Krishna that Banasur was his old devotee and had been granted protection by him. He prayed him to be merciful. Krishna replied, "Since you have granted a boon to Banasur, let him live. You must know that you are not different from me; that what I am, you are." Aniruddha was released, married to Usha and the couple accompanied Krishna back to Dwaraka. Shonitpura is the mythological name of Banasur's capital. There are many other names of the place; Ushavana, Kotivarsha, Banapura and Devikot. The last mentioned is commonly identified with Devicottah in Karnataka which is also believed to have been the scene of the battle. Other parts of the country also claim to have hosted the event. In the *Kalika Purana*, Bana is described as neighbour of Naraka, the raja of Assam. In Kumaon, Lohaghat also lays claim to have witnessed Bana's defeat. A place called Sarhan in Kinnaur, and Tezpur in Assam also lay claim to have been the Shontipura of the *Mahabharata*.

Usha is sometimes pronounced as Ukha in Garhwali and hence the name Ukimath or Okhimath. According to yet another legend, there lived two *rakshasas*, Shumbh and Nishumbh, at the site. Prayers of innocent victims aroused the wrath of Bhagwati who came like Usha and destroyed the demons. Hence the name Ushamath or Ukhimath. The town can be viewed across the Mandakini on the opposite ridge. We shall see it on our way back. Proceeding on, we reach Nala Chati bearing the name of the king Nala, a devotee of Bhagwati.

Story of Nala and Damayanti is well known all over the country. Nala, the king of Nishad, was very handsome. He could handle the wildest horses. He once caught a swan who told him about the unparalleled beauty of Damayanti the daughter, of king Bhim of Vidarbha. Nala sent a message to Damayanti through *Pakshiraj*. The swan drew a picture of Nala on a leaf and showed it to Damayanti. Thereafter he became a messenger of the lovers. Bhim decided to hold a *swayamvar* for Damyanti. News of the coming event was conveyed to Indra and other gods by Narad. Indira, the ruler of heaven, Varuna, the god of rain, Agni, the god of fire, and Yama, the god of death, also decided to join the *swayamvar*. Knowing that Damyanti would only choose Nala, the gods assumed his form at the *swayamvar*. Damyanti was puzzeld at the sight of five Nalas. However, she noticed that the feet of four of them were not touching the ground. Thus she chose the coveted one. They lived happily for many years. As luck would have it Kali possessed Nala out of jealousy. Nala started losing his temper over trifles and lost his kingdom in gambling. They roamed the jungles of Uttarakhand and visited Bhim Tal (See Pravesh 5). The lovers were separated when Nala left Damayanti sleeping in a cave. Damayanti had to work as a maid servant. Nala became a supervisor of the stable of the king

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of Ayodhya. Nala propitiated Bhagwati. By his good deeds, he came to know that Kali was the cause of his miseries. He decided to slay Kali but left him on a plea of mercy. The lovers were united through a series of interesting events, details of which are beyond the scope of our current *yatra*. It was here at Nala Chatti that Nala had worshipped Bhagwati. In addition to Bhagwati's temple, there are other old temples at Nala Chatti dating back to the thirteenth century. These are dedicated to Lalita Devi and Garur. There are also stone slabs with some inscriptions. The old route to Badrinath bifurcates at Nala Chatti.

As we proceed on the Kedarnath, we come across numerous small shrines, the main ones being dedicated to Naleshwar, Damayanti and Mata Devi. The next place we reach is Naryana Koti where the famous *danav* Bhasmasur invoked Shiva and got the boon that he could burn anyone by placing a hand on the head of his victim. True to demonic nature, he decided to kill Shiva and take Parvati as his wife. With that design, he started chasing Shiva. Parvati thought of a sly plan and approaching Bhasmasur addressed him thus, "Oh dear, why do you run after Shiva? Let him keep busy with his ghosts and goblins. I was looking for a handsome companion. Who could be better than you? Join me in a dance." Parvati told him to follow her movements. The dance started and Bhasmasur kept aping the movements of Gauri. As tempo picked up, Parvati chose an opportune moment and took her hand to head Bhasmasur fell a prey to feminine cunning and touched his own head with his hand. He was burnt to ashes. They story of Bhasmasur is a popular theme for the folk dances and is enacted in many a village dance and Hurkiya's displays at the fairs. Other places laying claim to the above incident are Suman near Barahoti and some areas in Tibet.

Two kilometres ahead of Narayan Koti, we reach Byung. A temple of Devi Mahisamardini is located here. It has its own story to tell. The *devatas* were under constant fear of the demon, Mahishasur, and approached the Hindu trinity, Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. Shakti Mahishasuramardini was produced by the combined will of the three gods. She killed the *asura* and saved *devalok* from destruction. Further up the road, we come to Maikhanda where pieces of Mahishasur were cut and strewn. Moving on, we reach Phata which has Jamadagni Muni ashram. Passing Rampur, at last we reach Sitapur from where one track leads to Triyugi Narayan to the left, and the other to Kedarnath.

It is said that the marriage between Shiva and Parvati was performed at Triyugi Narayan which was the capital of Himavat. There is a huge four-cornered *havana kunda* in which the fire was lit for the celestial marriage. The marriage took place in *satyayug*. Vishnu played a prominent part in the celebrations. All the sages came to attend the marriage. The balance of the country was upset and tilted northwards. Agastya Muni was sent to the south by Shiva to restore the balance. The remnants of the celes-

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tial fire are still in the *havana kunda*. Pilgrims offer pieces of wood to the fire which has been burning for three *yugas*. Hence the name Triyugi Narayan. The ashes are not only holy but are also capable of making married life happy. Of the medicinal qualities of *bhasam*, it is believed that taken with water, it ensures easy delivery, with cow's milk, it is a cure for T.B. and if applied as a *tika*, ensures safety from *bhut-pret*. There are three *kunds* at Triyugi Narayan; Rudra Kund, Vishnu Kund and Brahma Kund. The gods had bathed there at the time of Shiva's marriage. The water for all these *kunds* is believed to come from Saraswati Kund out of the navel of Vishnu. There is a belief that childless women are blessed on taking water from these *kunds*.

We can also reach Triyugi Narayan direct from Bhatwari on way to Gangotri. The track bifurcates near Malla which is three kilometres from Bhatwari. Kedarnath is 131 kilometres and can be covered in five days from Bhatwari. We have to cross two major spurs, one acting as a watershed between Bhagirathi and Bhilangana, and the second between Bhilangana and Mandakini. The Kedarnath peak is quite near and glimpses of the beautiful dome are obtained at a number of places.

The first day we pass through village Phyalu and should halt at Belah at a total distance of 21 kilometres. Belah is situated on a ridge called Kush Kalyani at the salubrious height of 7,000 feet and has a profusion of wild flowers, greeting and soothing the traveller. The best season for visit from this side is after the rains in September.

The second day should take us to Burha Kedar at a distance of about 25 kilometres. Situated at the confluence of the Bal Ganga and the Dharam Ganga, the place has an old Shiva temple that had its hey-day before the opening of the roads when it fell on the main *yatra* track.

On the third day, we will reach Ghuttichatti passing the temple of Bhairon at Bharon Chatti. Ghuttichatti is situated on the banks of Bhilangana. There is an old temple of Raghunath on the river bank with a fine view. It is in this area that Shiva is believed to roam in the form of a *bhil*. We have already crossed the first watershed and our muscles are now fully toned up for a greater achievement.

On the fourth day, we should aim at reaching Triyugi Narayan covering a distance of 40 kilometres and crossing the higher ridge at 11,000 feet. En route we pass through the famous Panwali Ridge on which Panwali village is situated. It commands an excellent close-up of the snow peaks. There is also an abundance of wild flowers. The best time for enjoying the floral beauty, however, is June and only the remnants are left by September. Glory of the wild blossoms is really short-lived! They blossom before the Monsoon at higher regions and after the rains at lower altitudes.

Continuing the journey from Sitapur, we need not go to Triyugi Narayan which may well be visited on return. As we move on, we reach Son Prayag also called Sondwara or Swarna Dwara. It is said that there

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was a Swaran Dwara here which was taken away by the Rohillas. Set in charming scenic beauty, the Son Prayag is the confluence of the Som Ganga and the Mandakini. The latter flows in a gushing tornado into the foaming confluence. There is a visitors' shed where one may rest a while to breathe fresh air and listen to the song of rushing waters. Those unable to walk, may engage a *kandi* or a *dandi*. In times to come, a road may take you right upto Kedarnath.

After five kilometres, we come to Gauri Kund. Half a kilometre short of Gauri Kund is the temple of Sirkata Ganesh; or the beheaded Ganesh. The *Skand Purana* tells the legend of Sirkata Ganesh. Parvati was once having a bath at Gauri Kund and asked her son Ganesh to sit as a sentinel. Mahadeva came that way. He was stopped by Ganesh. Mahadeva flew into a rage and cut off the head of Ganesh. Parvati, oblivious of what fate had befallen her son, kept enjoying the bath. She was, however, startled to hear the footsteps of approaching Mahadeva and not knowing the identity of the intruder sent Nandi, to guard the entrance. A fierce contest took place between Nandi and Mahadeva who was furious at being persistently stopped from meeting his wife. The gods requested Parvati to withdraw her *vibhutis*. Coming to know the fate of her child, she implored Shiva to resurrect him. The jungles were searched for a suitable head to be fixed on the body. Who could be better than an elephant? Hence Ganesh came to be called as Ganapati. There are many other versions. Parvati desired a child. Shiva asked her to propitiate Vishnu. Vishnu allowed a part of himself to be born as Ganesh. So pretty was the child that all *devatas* came to see him, Shani's look of jealousy severed the head of the child. Vishnu then placed the head of an elephant and the child came to be called Ganapati.

At Gauri Kund, the two *kunds* are called Tapta Kund and Gauri Kund. There is also a huge rock called Uma Shankar *shila*. It is said that the spirits of 12 *rishis* who followed Mahadeva from Sri Lanka after their expulsion from their reside in this *shila*. Nearby are the images of Gauri, Radha Krishna and Jwala Devi.

Moving on, at a distance of two kilometres from Gauri Kund, we reach the Cheerbasa Bhairava. The place once again reminds us of the Pandavas in their desperate pursuit of Lord Shiva. Bhairava, which in one of the innumerable forms and incarnations of Shiva, stopped them here. All entreaties of the brothers failed. They had already been charged with *gotra hatya* and could ill afford another fight, though Bhim was getting impatient to try his powers.

At last Dropadi tore off a piece of her *saree* (*cheer*) and offered to Bhairava who was moved. Pandavas were allowed to proceed on. It was customary to offer a piece of cloth at the wayside temple. Nearby is the cave called Bhim Udyar or Bhim cave. The mighty Pandava built it for rest by the party.

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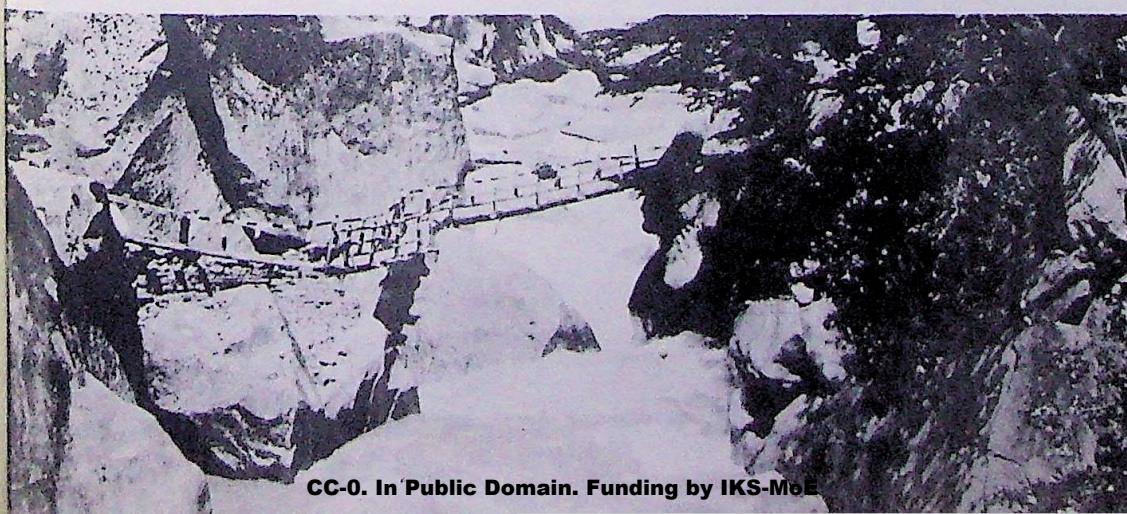
The trunk of the *Deodar* tree that lived for more than 700 years.
(Courtesy : F.R.I. Dehra Dun,)

Jahnavi and Bhagirathi meet in one of the deepest gorges in the world



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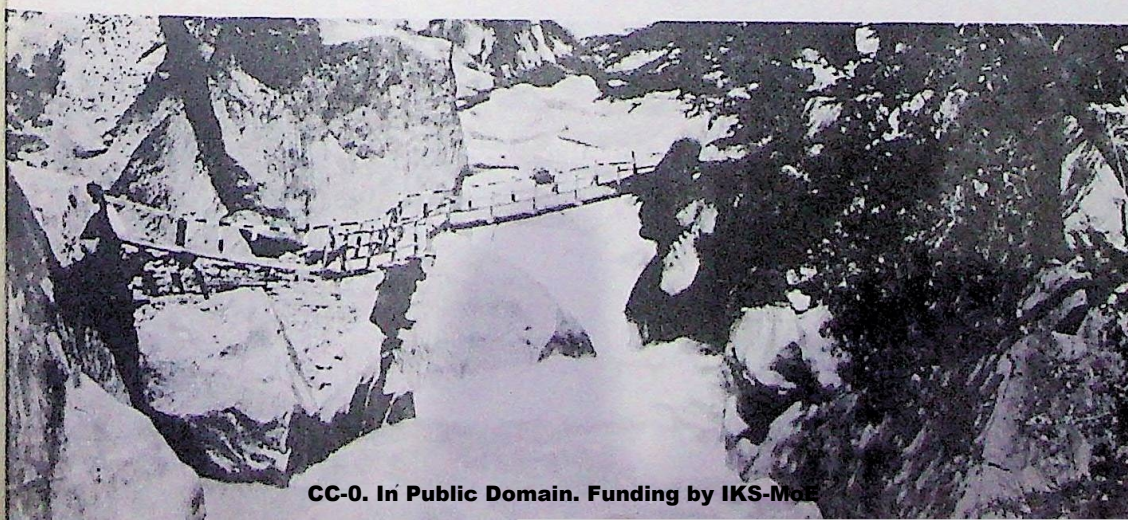

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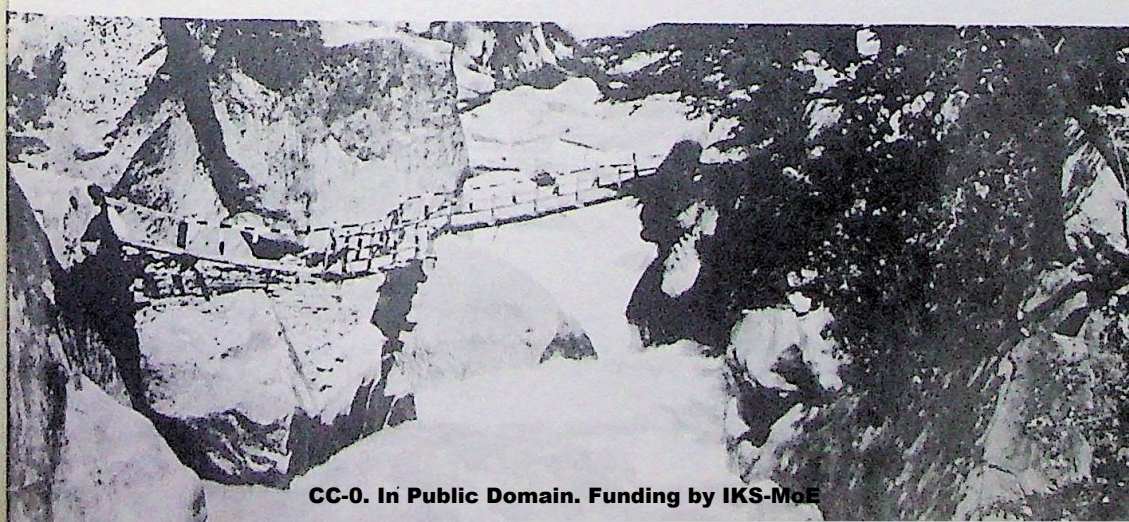

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Jalandhary Gad

Mount Nilkantha, the queen of Garhwal Himalayas

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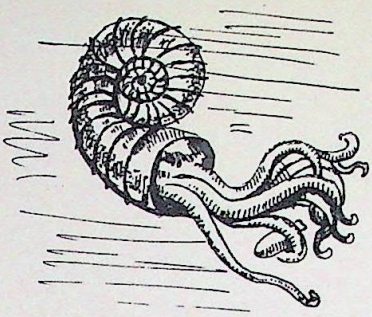

A remnant from the Sea of Tethys—An ammonite. These fossils are found at high altitudes of the Himalayan ranges

A Bhotia lady with a load of grass for cattle

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Hurakiyas of Gorichhal

A carpet-maker of Johar

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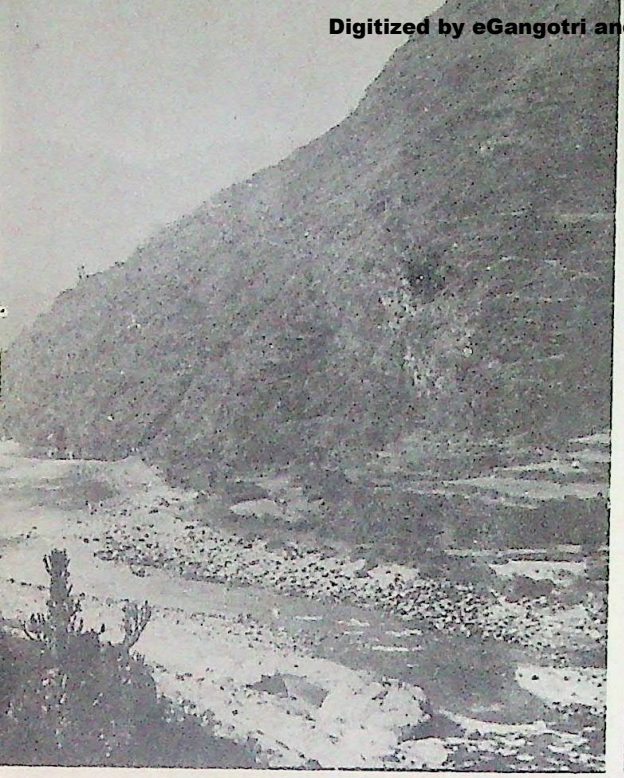
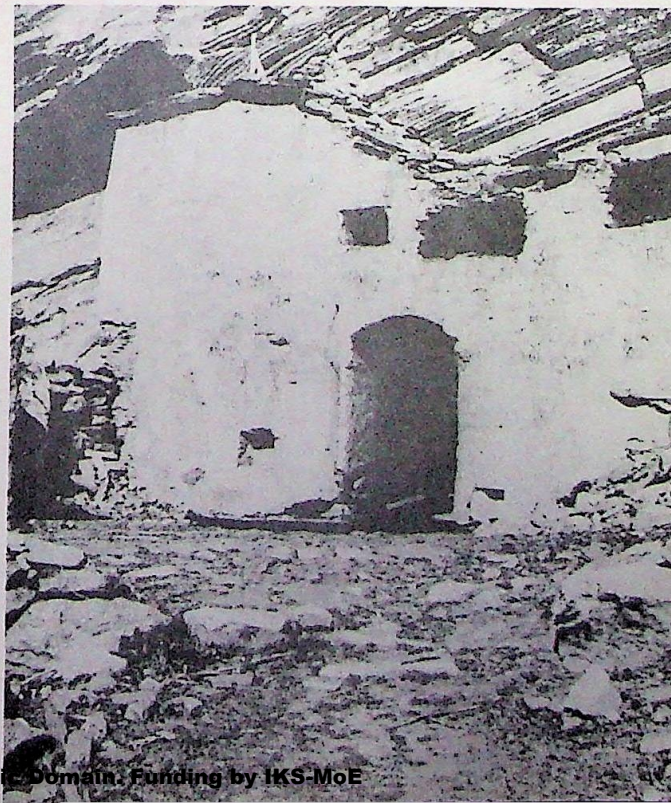


Yamuna, the *Surya kanya*

Bholi (author's wife) with a Bhotia lady c
village Mana

Snows of Harsil

Vyas *gupha*—Here the epic, *Mahabharata*, is said to have b
composed.



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A Bhotia couple of Gorichhal

A deserted village in Johar

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Hemkund Parvat

Chholia, a mock fight for forcible carriage of the bride

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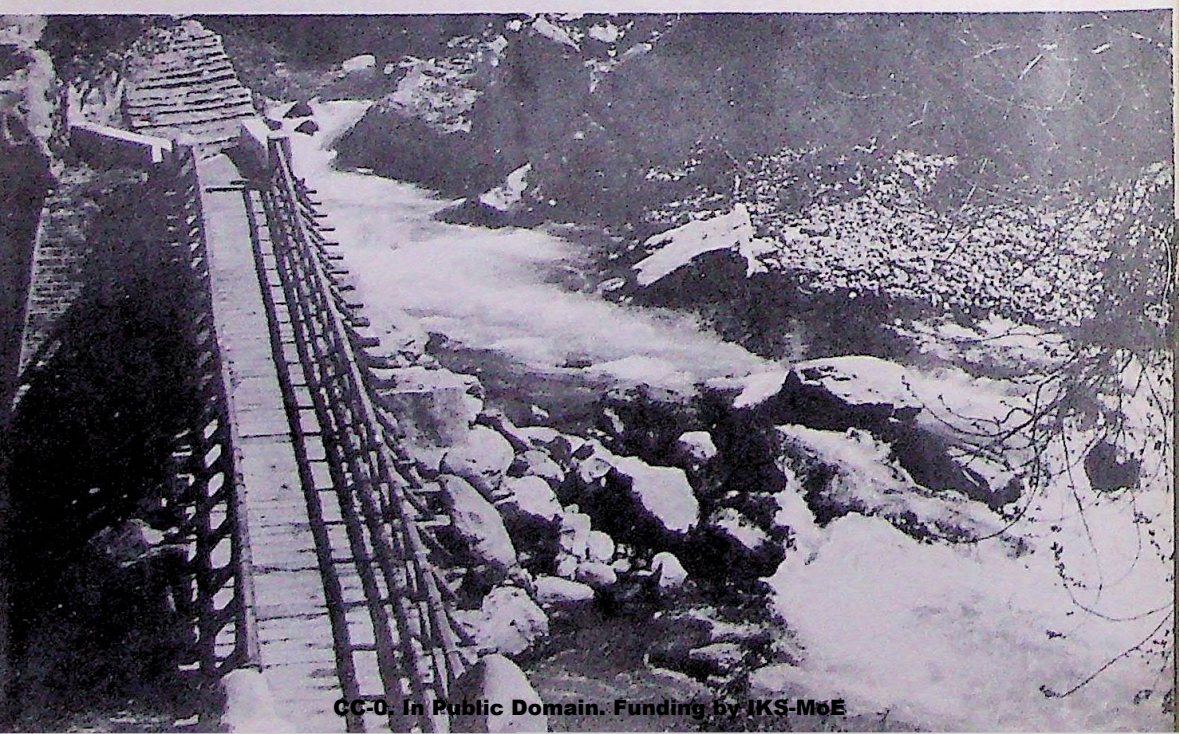
Panch chuli Mountains, or the five friends—The beauty queens of Uttarakhand.

A Bhotia lady with her child on her back

Tawaghat—the foaming confluence of Mahakali and Dharam Ganga



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From Gauri Kund to just short of Kedarnath, the ascent is steep. The tree-line is left a little ahead of Cheerbasa Bhairav. The temple comes in view from a distance of about three kilometres. Viewed against the background of snow-covered peaks, the temple looks gorgeous.

Situated on the left bank of the Mandakini, the Kedarnath temple lies in Northing 30°-44′-15′ and Easting 79°-6′-33′ at an elevation of 3,910 metres. It is located at the head of a cup-shaped valley measuring about five kilometres by two kilometres. It is an imposing building with an impressive facade. The Mandakini flows in a serpentine fashion along the side of Kedarpuri, a satellite village of the temple. The shrine is one of the 12 most sacred temples of Shiva called Jyotir Lingas. It is a stone structure with huge slabs believed to have been put up by Bhim. The temple was erected at the site where Bhim ultimately located Pashupati Nath. It is also said that the temple owes its construction to Janamejaya, the great grandson of Arjuna.

We are aware that the shrine had fallen into decay during the Buddhist era and it was Shri Adi Shankaracharya who re-established it. Shri Shankaracharya died at Kedarnath at the young age of 32 and his *samadhi* is located about a hundred metres to the left of the temple at the back. Shankaracharya walked around with a wooden staff. A huge emblem of his staff has been built on an imposing wall to the left of the temple.

Shankaracharya was a leader with a great vision and fully grasped the requirements of the fundamental unity of this great land. His very selection of places for establishment of his *mathas* in four corners of India was a method of impressing the unity of *Bharata* on the minds of the masses. Born in Travancore in a Nambudiri Brahmin family, he lost his mother at an early age and devoted himself whole-heartedly to the study of Hindu religion. During his *vijaya yatra*, undertaken to re-establish Hinduism, he performed penance at Srisailam in Andhra Pradesh which is considered one of the sacred Shiva *kshetras*.

Shankaracharya was a great writer and commentator. He established *mathas* or monasteries for his disciples at Sringeri on Tungabhadra in Mysore, Jyotirmath near Badrinath, Saradamath at Dwarka in Gujarat and the Vardhanamath at Puri in Orissa. Shankara also visited Kashmir, where he overcame his opponents and was enthroned in the chair of Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Shankara's temple near Srinagar still draws pilgrims from all over the country. He visited Badri and restored the temple of Vishnu. He finally proceeded to Kedar, where he died at the early age of 32. He exercised more influence on the religious opinions of the Indians than any other teacher in history. No one else in the world has ever had such a following. He roamed about this ancient land purifying it with his thoughts and precepts. He was a man of inexhaustible energy and his output of work is surely unparalleled in the history of

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mankind. He is one of the finest stars of Hinduism. He was also a sensitive poet. His *Saundarya Lahri* and *Sivananda Lahri* have magnificent lyrical quality. His achievements were so astounding that one has to explicitly agree with K.M. Munshi when he says, "I have always stood in awesome admiration of the life and achievements of Shankara Bhagavatpada."

The other claimant to the construction of the temple is Raja Bhoj whose name needs no introduction. However, the more commonly believed tradition is that the Pandavas who followed Shiva up to here and were absolved of their sins, built the temple. After its completion, the Pandavas climbed Mahapanth, or the great path which is located on the mountain behind the temple. The Pandavas ascended heaven from here to merge into the Divine. It was a popular belief till the early nineteenth century that a similar blessing would be conferred on any person who would reach Mahapanth or perish on the way. Alternatively devotees could jump to sacrifice from a precipice called Bhairava Jhamp and attain their objects of adoration in the next life. G.W. Traill noted that there were about twenty to twenty-five votaries mainly from Gujarat and Bengal who perished annually. Before sacrificing themselves at the altar of Shiva, their names were inscribed on the walls of some temples. In the Gopeshwar temple, there are a number of such records and the last one bears the date of 1820. The practice was officially stopped in 1823 by the orders of G.W. Traill. It may also be mentioned, that G.W. Traill attributes the present structure of the temple to the family of one Kajee Ameer Singh in the early nineteenth century.

An imposing statue of Nandi stands outside the temple which can be divided in two parts. The front portion is known as the *garbha grih* and the rear as *sabha bhavan*. In the *garbha grih*, images of Paravati, Pandavas, Kunti, Dropadi, Krishna and Ganapati have been carved on stones laid in the walls. The five-headed idol of Shiva is in the middle. There are 24 images of *avatars* on the main gate and 64 images on the gate of the *garbha grih*. In the *sabha bhavan*, a triangular icon of impressive dimensions covered by a canopy, represents the hinder parts of the divine buffalo.

The head priest called *Rawal* comes from the Lingayat or Veerashaive Brahmins of Karnataka. His permanent residence is at Okhimath. His *chela* conducts the worship at Kedarnath. The details of *puja sewas* are given at the end.

The temple is closed for winters on the first day of *Kartika* falling during October-November. It is normally closed about a week prior to the shrine of Badrinath and is also opened earlier in *Baisakh* corresponding to the end of April or early May. During winter, Kedarpuri is completely covered with snow, the accumulation being about two metres high. A few years back, a single soul, one Phalera Baba, used to stay back in winter. The mendicant kept the *akhand jyoti* burning all the year round. He must be resting in heaven now. During winter, the worship of the Lord is

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performed at Okhimath in a temple dedicated to King Mandhata.

Kedarpuri is much colder than Badrinathpuri. The area around is marshy and devoid of any vegetation and fuel. There is a Birla *dharamsala* which is very well constructed and comfortable. A government hotel under the provincial tourist department is also under construction. During winter, the *chela* also retires to Okhimath. *Rawals* at the other shrines, comprising the Panch Kedar, also retire to their winter resorts. Tunganath establishment shifts to Makh, Rudranath to Gopeshwar, Madhyamatheshwar and Kedarnath to Okhimath and Kalpeshwar to Urgam. Any negligence in the rituals is punished. In 1823, when the plague named *mahamari* broke out, it was believed to be because of non-observance of *pujas* at Panch Kedar!

Of places of unique natural beauty in the vicinity of Kedarnath, lake Vasuki Tal figures first. Situated on the right bank of Mandakini at a distance of about five kilometres or three hours from temple. the lake is about 500 metres by 200 metres. Numerous hoof-marks of the high altitude antelope like *barhal* and musk deer indicate the popularity of the lake. It is also a favourite spot for the snow leopard. Moving further west, one could hope to reach Dharali near Harsil or Gangotri where Kedar Ganga descends to meet Bhagirathi. *Rishis* and *Munis* of the old used to undertake these treks to reach Kedarnath from Gangotri and vice-versa. A host of *brahmakamal* flowers grow around Vasuki Tal. The return journey from Vasuki Tal affords some charming views of the distant Badrinath peaks and the hazy outlines of Nanda Devi, Nanda Gunthi, Nanda Kot and Trishul. Nearing Kedarnath on return, we get an aerial view of the shrine located at the confluence of five streams, the Mandakini, the Saraswati, the Kashir Ganga, the Swarnadwari and the Mahodadi. At the site of the confluence, there is a temple dedicated to Sangameshwar Mahadev. There are five *kunds* at Kedarnath; Amrit Kund, Hamsa Kund, Retas Kund, Uddak Kund and Chorabari Tal. The last is also called Gandhi Smarak Tal since ashes of the father of the nation were immersed there in 1948. The water of Uddak Kund is considered to be a panacea for all physical as well as mental ailments. The bubbles constantly emanating from Retas Kund are believed to recite. '*Om Namoh Shivaye.*'

On the left bank of Mandakini, over a beautiful elongated hill, stands the temple of Baikunth Bhairava. A visit is considered to bestow prowess on the devotees.

The Hindu kings of Garhwal took interest in the temple some time and whereas some made endowments of villages, others borrowed money from the temple which was hardly ever returned. During the rule of the Gorkhas, temples were comparatively better managed and maintained. Thus we see that the rule of the Gorkhas was neither so ruthless nor heartless as depicted by some of their contemporary British historians. In fact, it was benevolent in more than one way. Hence, the classic issue has

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always been; who is writing whose history?

E.T. Etkinson recorded in 1886 that the income of the temple which was derived from endowments consisting of 54 villages, had a rental of Rs. 837 a year. Offerings varied from 5,000 to 10,000 rupees annually. Gross mismanagement, however, led to the temple being taken in the folds of the Badrinath Act in 1948. The schedule forming the group of temples under the temple committee is as under:

(1) Uddak Kund at Kedarnath.
(2) Minor temples at Kedarnath.
(3) Vishwanath temple at Gupta Kashi.
(4) Other temples within the precincts of Vishwanath temple at Gupta Kashi.
(5) Usha temple at Okhimath.
(6) Brahi temple at Okhimath.
(7) Madhyamaheshwar temple.
(8) Mahakali temple at Kalimath.
(9) Mahasaraswati temple at Kalimath.
(10) Maha Laxmi temple at Kalimath.
(11) Gauri Mayi temple at Gauri Kund.
(12) Narayan temple at Triyugi Narayan.
(13) Tunganath temple at Tunganath.
(14) Minor temples within Triyugi Narayan temple.
(15) Tunganath temple at Makku.
(16) Kalashila temple at Kalashila.

Having seen all around, it is time now to return. A visit to Shankaracharya's *samadhi* to pay homage to one of the all time great leaders of India should be the last though not the least. The *samadhi* was in a decayed old shack till late Dr. Sampurna Nand ordered its renovation.

It is good to leave early in the morning. The cold is intense but the sunrise creates a magnetic splendour. On the return journey, you can enjoy the scenery much better and realize that you are in a valley of a most rugged scenic beauty. Looking around from a height you can see that the area is strewn with splashes of colour. These are the wild flowers that grow in real profusion. In fact, the area from Gauri Kund to Kedarnath can be called a Valley of Flowers.

From Gupta Kashi we need not return to Agastya Muni and can proceed direct to Okhimath and other shrines. The old track is from Nala Chatti as stated earlier. The legendary origin of Okhimath has been already stated above. This is the permanent residence of the Rawal of Kedarnath. In a large compound at Okhimath, there are beautiful images of fiveheaded Mahadeva like the one in Kedarnath temple, Parvati, Dropadi and the Pandavas. The temple of Omkareshwar, an incarnation of Shiva is well located and well kept. The face of Shiva is beautifully carved. King Mandhata had invoked Shiva in the *satya yuga* at this place. There is also

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a temple of Usha whose name the town carries. The idol of Chitralekha, the confidante of Usha who helped her to contact Aniruddha is also in the precincts of the temple. Many copper plates have been discovered at Okhimath. It is interesting to note that two plates contain land endowments to the temple of Kedarnath by the king of Nepal in 1797 and by the mother of an officer of the Nepal court in 1891. Before leaving Okhimath, it is desirable to visit another lake of immense charm and scenic beauty. Barely 10 kilometres north east of Okhimath on a plateau is the lake of Deoria Tal. It is fed by the springs at its bed. The lake is about 390 metres long, 240 metres broad and 20 metres deep. The location commands a grand view all around. The Badrinath peaks get reflected in the lake offering a unique spectacle.

In case you are not road bound, you could easily bifurcate at Jurani, seven kilometres, short of Gupta Kashi to go to Kalimath and then on to Madhayamaheshwar. In fact, there are a number of tracks between Gupta Kashi and Okhimath that could take you on to Kalimath and if you have the will, you sure will find the way. From Jurani, you cross rivers Kali and Mandakini. From the bridge at Mandakini, Kalimath is barely two kilometres. The track is covered with jungles of pine. At Kalimath, there is a temple of Kali Devi. The legend goes that Chandi Devi, an apostle of feminine beauty and charm, was coveted by two brothers, kings Shumba and Nishumba. They had two spies, Chanda and Munda whose main job was to find out comely maidens to satiate the lust of their masters. Once Chanda and Munda were on their usual rounds and saw Chandi sitting on a *shila* after bath. She was looking the very embodiment of beauty. The brothers, expecting a great reward went straight to their masters to report their find. The kings sent Sugriva, their messenger to tell Chandi to voluntarily become their wife or to be prepared for forcible abduction. Needless to say, the kings were slayed. As per another legend, the gods became afraid of the *asura*, Rakatvijaya and prayed to Chandi Mata to destroy him. The *asura* was done to death by the Chandi as Kali Mata. *Shila* where Chandi sat is about three hundred metres from the temple and is known as Kalashila. The impressions of the *devi's* hands can still be seen there. Kalimath is considered to be a *siddha pith* or the place where your prayers are answered and your desires fulfilled.

The temple of Madhayamaheshwar is at a distance of about twenty-five kilometres and is a difficult trek. The trouble is worth taking for the scenery is grand and the views magnificent.

We next proceed to Tunganath which is about 23 kilometres from Okhimath. The road passes within a few kilometres of the temple through a dense forest. Situated at a height of 4,000 metres, Tunganath offers a close view of Chaukhamba and Kedarnath and a distant view of the Gangotri and Yamunotri Ranges. This is the very highest *tiratha* in Uttarakhand. *Godan* at Tunganath ensures salvation of 29 generations. A

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temple of Nanda Devi is also located at Tunganath. At little distance from the temple, there is a magnificent fall standing at the base of which, you get the impression that the water is coming straight from the skies. It is most appropriately named Akash Ganga. Moving on, there are a few other places namely Mandal Chatti and Rudranath, the fourth of Panch Kedar. The next major halt is at Gopeshwar. There is a Shiva trident here made of eight metals containing inscriptions dating back to the tweltfth century. The trident was put up by Anek Malla, the king of Nepal. The inscriptions on the trident sing the praises of Anek Malla. It is believed that if a real devotee touches the *trishul*, it snakes, whereas blind strength cannot move it a bit. Gopeshwar is the legendary place where Shiva had burnt down Kamadeva. Other names of the place are Ratishwar, Pashvishwar, Gosthal. It is said that in *satyuga*, cows used to offer milk to the Shiva. Hence the name Gopeshwar.

From Gopeshwar, we reach Chamoli and join road Srinagar-Joshimath. On the way to Joshimath, we reach Helang from where we can move on to Kalpeshwar, the last of the Panch Kedar. Situated on the banks of river Kalpeshwar falling from a great height, the temple is situated at a lovely spot with a magnificent view. And with that, we have visited the last of Panch Kedars.

Whatever the origin of the legend of the divine buffalo and whatever the truth is a separate issue. Faith moves mountains and has an innate power of unification. The skilful legend of Shiva has unified whole of Himalayan Range from Kashmir to Nepal as one kingdom of Kailashpati. The south has its own version of Kailash. Throngs of devotees visit Pashupati Nath in Nepal, Kedarnath in Uttarakhand and Amarnath in Kashmir. Shiva is thus the god of national unity.

Om Namo Shivaye.

PUJA SEWAS IN KEDARNATH TEMPLE

The following are the schedules for *puja sewas* in Kedarnath temple. *Pujas* may be registered one day before the performance:–

		Rs.
1.	Morning *Puja*	11.00
2.	Balabhoga	21.00
3.	Maha Abhisheka	301.00
4.	Rudra Abhisheka	151.00
5.	Laghu Rudra Abhisheka	101.00
6.	Panchopachar	11.00
7.	Ashtopachar	25.00
8.	Shodashopachar *Puja*	51.00
9.	Shiva *Puja* (ordinary)	2.00

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		Rs.
10.	Shri *Puja* (whole day)	501.00
11.	Arati (sampurna)	51.00
12.	Pandava *Puja*	1.00
13.	Ganesh *Puja*	1.00
14.	Bhairava *Puja*	5.00
15.	Parvati *Puja*	2.00

Evening Pujas

1.	Shiv Ashtottar Path	8.00
2.	Shiv Sahasranam	15.00
3.	Shiv Namawali	25.00
4.	Shiv Mahima Stottra	25.00
5.	Shiv Apradhan Vshmapan Stottra	21.00
6.	Shiv Tandav Stottra	21.00
7.	Ekant Sewa	21.00

Bhoga

1.	Uttam Bhoga	251.00
2.	Vishesha	151.00
3.	Sadharana	101.00
4.	Khichari	251.00
5.	Nitya Bhoga	5.00
6.	Atka	5.00
7.	Nitya Yagya Bhaint	11.00
8.	Somwar and Sankranti Yagya	21.00
9.	Srawani Purnima Annakuta	700.00
10.	Dipadana	6.00
11.	Akhand Jyoti	21.00
12.	Kirtan	7.00

Puja is also performed on behalf of anyone who may be unable to reach the temple. Date on which the *puja* is to be performed should be intimated to the Chief Executive Officer, Kedarnath.

It is noteworthy that the *arati* in the temple contains passages from *Kumar Sambhava* of Kalidas.

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18

Badrinath Yatra

HISTORICALLY, IT may not be possible to establish the period when Badrika Ashram came into being. It may well be as old as the history of human habitations in the Himalayas which have been an inseparable part of Hinduism. The *Skand Purana* says, "He who thinks of Himachal, though he may not behold it, is greater than he who performs all worship in Kashi. In a hundred ages of the gods, I could not tell thee of the glories of Himachal. As the dew is dried up by the morning sun, so are the sins of mankind by the sight of Himavat." This place of honour that the Himalayas occupy in our religion is undoubtedly due to the location of sacred shrines like Amarnath, Kedarnath, Pashupatinath, Badrinath and many others. During our visit to Kedarnath, we have seen that Shiva has claims to be the oldest inhabitant of Badrinath and that a visit to Kedarnath should precede a visit to Badrinath. Does it mean that Shiva is an older deity? Not necessarily so. Far too many accounts talk about Shiva coming to the hills at a later period. Kedarnath belongs to the age of epics. In case of Badrinath, however, there are accounts giving ancient names of the place during *satyuga*, *dwapar* and so on. The only surmise, therefore, is that the shrine is as old as the Hindus in Himalayas and the glories of Himachal are the glories of the gods dwelling there.

The Hindu scriptures record the different names of Badrinath through the ages; in *satyuga* it was Muktiprada or the land of Salvation, during *treta*, Yogsiddhika or the bestower of Yogic attainment, during *dwapar* it was known as Manibhadara ashram or Bishala after the name of King Bishal who meditated at Badrinath. The name Badri is derived from *badri* or plum trees which grew in abundance in the area and provided sustenance to *Rishis* and *Munis*. At present, the place is too high for *badri* trees. Does it mean that at one time it was fit for them? Does it signify that upwards thrust of the Himalayas has slowly made it unfit for *badri* trees? What all has gone on this timeless Earth; who but God knows.

Dharmaraj and his wife Mata Murti had two sons, Nar and Narayan.

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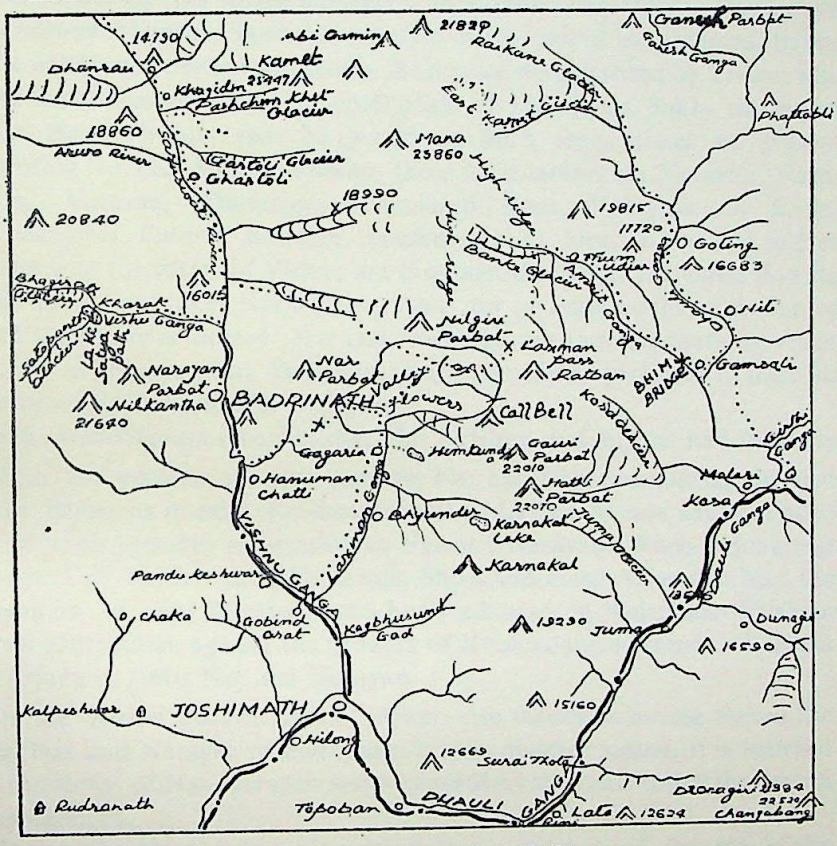
BADRINATH-VALLEY OF FLOWERS-HEMKUND-NITI



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Narayan was an incarnation of Vishnu whereas Nar was Arjuna. Both Nar and Narayan prayed at Badrinath for the deliverance of mankind. One name of the shrine is, therefore, Nar Narayan Ashram.

There are several other legends. According to one, Vishnu dived many times in the river after a holy image which fell from *swarga* into the Vishnu Ganga. He succeeded the tenth time and having recovered the image, he built a temple at the place where the present shrine now stands.

Badrinath is the shrine dedicated to Vishnu. The *Matsya Purana* and the *Shrimad Bhagwat Purana* give details of his various incarnations. In one of the battles of *devatas* with *asuras*, the former were assisted by Vishnu who killed the mother of Sukra, the chief priest of the *asuras*. Sukra thereupon put a curse on him that he would be born seven times on *prithvi*. According to the *Matsya Purana*, these incarnations are Narayan, Narasimha, Vamana, Dattatreya, Parasuram, Ram, Vedayasa and Kalki. The *Bhagwat Purana*, however, enumerates 22 incarnations and in fact stresses that the forms of Vishnu are innumerable like little rivulets flowing from an eternal lake. Nar and Narayan are two mountains in the lap of which the shrine is located. Nar and Narayan are two incarnations which concern us the most at Badrinath. It is, therefore, pertinent to trace all scriptural references to Nar-Narayan.

The *Mahabharata* recounts that Shri Krishna and Arjuna had formerly lived in the persons of two *tapasvis* Nar and Narayan. During his visit to the Pandavas in exile, Krishna himself addressed Arjuna and reminded him of their previous association as Nar and Narayan. When Arjuna met Mahadeva in the forests of Himachal, Shiva addressed Arjuna as Nar, the companion of rishi Narayan who had meditated in Badrinath. Bhisham warned Duryodhan against the prowess of Krishna and referred to Krishna and Arjuna as *rishis* Nar and Narayan.

In the *Narad Purana*, Narad Muni also recollects having visited the *rishis* Nar and Narayan at Badrinath. In yet another legend, it is believed that the forms of Nar-Narayan were assumed by the Lord to kill the demon Sahasrakancha.

The *Mahabharata* also contains a lucid account of the rise of the *Vaishnava* school in India. According to this, Vishnu assumed four forms, Nar, Narayan, Krishna and Hari. Nar and Narayan went to the *Badrika Ashram* to perform *tapasya* for the good of the world and mankind. As per the Narayaneeya portion of the Shantiparya of the epic, Narad, went to Badrinath and wished to know the identity of the *yogis*, Nar and Narayan, and the reason for the austere life they where leading. The *yogis* advised Narad to proceed to the white island (*Shevta-dveep*) in the Milky Ocean (*Ksheera-Sagara*) to find out their true source. Narad went to *Ksheera Sagara* and saw Vishnu himself. Thus knowing the real identity of Nar and Narayan, Narad returned to *Badrika Ashram* and spent many years there in the vicinity of divine sages. Narad is still believed to visit there

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during winter to propitiate Vishnu.

In yet another reference from the *Mahabharata*. Krishna advised his disciple Uddhav to go to Badrinath for penance. He asked Uddhav to go to his *ashram* in the Badri region to purify himself by bathing in the waters of the Vishnu Ganga that is born from the very feet of the Lord. Shri Krishna promised salvation to Uddhav and union with the Supreme, that is Himself if all this were done. Uddhav left Dwaraka and after meeting Vidura, the uncle of the Pandavas went to Badrinath. He found the sages Nar and Narayana carrying on *tapasaya* there. He lived in their company for a long time and attained salvation. Uddhav described this place as the one most dear to the Lord. For his *bhakti*, he was given a place in the shrine by the Lord and the idol of Uddhav also adorns the *ashram*. The first verse in each of the 18 sections of the *Mahabharata* reads: *Narayanam namaskritya Naram caiva narottamam devim Sarasvatim Vyasam tato jayamucharyet*: After saluting Narayan and Nar and the divine Sarasvati, one should recite the 'victorious treaties'.

It is in fact very difficult to solve all the mysteries of mythology. From what has been said, one fact stands out that Badrinath is one of the oldest shrines of the Hindus. Different authors gave different versions to stress the sanctity of the place and the legends got a bit complicated.

In the hey-day of Buddhism, the shrine suffered a set back and Tibetan fanatics threw the image in the Narad Kund. Badrinath Dham was re-established by Adi Shankaracharaya some time in the eighth century a.d. Shankaracharya was a man of great foresight and fostered the unity of the country in his typical down-to-earth way. According to tradition Shankaracharya found the idol lying in the Vishnu Ganga at this spot and brought it out. He heard an *akashavani* telling him that this was the image of god that had descended from heaven and he had been chosen to establish it there. He put it under a *badri* tree which grew so rapidly that its shade extended from Badrinath to Nand Prayag. The idol carries the smooth polish of erosion by sandy water which gives strength to the idea that it was under water for a considerable time. The present temple was built by the Maharaja of Tehri in the fifteenth century.

The temple is built on the right bank of the river Vishnu Ganga over the site of a hot spring. Badrinath is also the name of a group of peaks popularly known as Chaukhamba which are clearly visible from various places in Uttarakhand. The peaks resemble the great *stupa* of Sanchi. There is also a satellite village by the name Badrinathpuri. The shrine is situated in a valley which is about five kilometres long and one kilometre wide. The two great mountains Nar and Narayan Parvat, rise to the east and west. The temple lies in north latitude 30°-44′-29″ and east longitude 70°-32′-1″ at an elvation of approximately 3,420 metres.

As we cross river Vishnu Ganga over the bridge, to the right are the *tapta kunds* which are supplied by subterranean communication

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channels. The first one is for men. A separate walled enclosure for women is to the right of the former. Both of them are roofed with corrugated sheets culminating in a cone. Below them is an open-air *kund*. The water has curative properties and is good for skin diseases. People carry it to far-off places for relatives and friends. The water at the source is so hot that rice is tied in small cloth bags and kept for boiling. The winter residents of the shrine resort to cooking rice by this method. It is believed that Agni, the god of fire has been allowed to stay in the *tapta kunds* by Vishnu.

There is a recess in the bed of the river under a rock forming a pool called Narad Kund. A little to the left is the Surya Kund, another hot spring flowing from a fissure in the bank. There is no reservoir here and the pilgrims cup their hands or use small containers to take the water to sprinkle over their bodies.

The principal temple is called Raj or Dhyan Badri. Like Panch Kedar, there are also Panch Badri, namely, Yog or Jog Badri at Pandukeshwar, Kapala Badri or Bhavishya Badri at Tapoban, Narsimha Badri at Joshimath and Ad Badri. The idol in the Badrinath shrine is carved out of black *saligram* stone and is about three feet high. The image is usually clothed in rich gold brocade. On his head is a small mirror which reflects the outside objects. In front of him, several lamps are always kept burning. The idol has a personal wardrobe with many dresses and ornaments. In addition, there are other things like utensils and the like. The image is in a meditative pose, with locked palms and the matted hair falling gracefully over thc shoulders. At the left are the idols of Narayan and Nar in the *Padmaasan* and *Dhanurasan* respectively. An idol of Kubera, the lord of wealth, is placed to the right. The idol of Uddhav stands in front of the Lord on the side of which a silver image of *Garuda* and an image of Narad Muni are kept. The temple also has the *sudarshan yantra* in silver The temple of Lakshmi is in a separate building.

The journey to Badrinath may be started at any of the points reached by us during *pravesh*. From Rudra Prayag, we may go to Karna Prayag, Nand Prayag, Joshimath, Pandukeshwar, Hanuman Chatti and Badrinath. Those returning from Gangotri, may reach Tehri and then cut across to Srinagar or move on to Gansali and came down to Rudra Prayag for continuing the journey to Badrinath. The routes from Kotdwar and Kashipur converge on to Srinagar. From Ranikhet and Almora, one may move on to Dwarahat-Simli-Karna Prayag or Bagheshwar-Gwaldam-Simli-Karna Prayag. From Pithoragarh, we reach Didihat, Thal-Chaukori-Bagheshwar and then onwards to Badrinath. On all the routes, Karna Prayag is the focal point and we shall start our journey from there. Karna Prayag is at the confluence of the Pindari and the Alaknanda. Karna, the son of Kunti and Surya propitiated Surya at this holy confluence and was blessed with unusual might. The meeting point is called Karna Kund. It is an ideal

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fishing spot. It is believed that the biggest fish normally congregate there seven days after *Baisakhi*. Whether there is any truth in this statement is difficult to say. Rishi Kanwa had his *ashram* at Karna Prayag—where Shakuntala met Dushyanta. The enchanting story of Shakuntala was first presented to the western world by William Jones. Goethe had fallen in love with the charming tale. It is a pity that we in India do not know much about our ancient literature.

Next we reach Nand Prayag, the confluence of the Alaknanda and the Nandakini. It is said that Nand, a king of the prehistoric Yadu dynasty had his capital here. Yasodha was his wife. They had all the treasures of the world but were unhappy for they were childless. They came to Nand Prayag for *tapasya*. Vishnu was pleased with their devotion and appeared in person. He asked the couple to demand a boon. They requested for a son like Vishnu. The Lord had already promised Devaki and Vasudeva a similar boon. So he told the couple that though he would be born to Devaki, Yasodha would bring up the child. Since that day, the place came to be called Nand Prayag. From here, old tracks lead on to Tapoban over the Kuari pass and the mysterious lake Rupkund via Bedeni. The routes pass through most charming landscape and are a trekkers' delight. Moving on by road, we reach Joshimath.

During the reign of the Katyuris, Joshimath was called Joshika. The legendary origin of the town is that when Shiva was roaming in rage carrying the charred body of *Sati*, her eyes fell off here and the place came to be called Jyotirmath. Shri Adi Shankaracharya established his *gaddi* here. He planted a mulberry tree with his own hands. The tree is still in existence and the circumference of the trunk is almost 15 metres. In the hollow of the trunk, four men or a cow can easily sit. The tree is believed to be a *kalpa vriksha*. Under the tree is the cave where Shankar lived. Nearby are the temples of Yotishwar Mahadeva and the building containing the *gaddi* of Shri Shankaracharya. It is believed that the present building was constructed in 1898, the ancient one having been destroyed in the earthquake of 1851-52.

Joshimath is one of the five Badris (Panch Badri) and the winter residence of the *Rawal*. This was the old capital of the Katyuris. As per legend, Hiranyakashipu, a demon king worshipped Vishnu here and was blessed with the boon that he could neither be killed during day nor night, neither indoors nor outdoors, neither by a man nor a beast. Assured of immortality and true of demonic nature, he declared himself to be the God. So tyrannical did he become that Vishnu appeared in the shape of Narasimha, half-man, half-lion, and killed him when the sun had half set and it was neither day nor night and at a place which was just on the doorway. Since that day, the worship of Narasimha *avatar* is carried on in the temple of Narasimha. The reasons for shifting of the Katyuri capital from Joshimath to Baijnath is also connected with the above

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legend. Once the *raja* was out hunting and Narasimha visited his place in the guise of a Brahmin. It was the day of *dwadashi* falling due after *ekadashi vrata*. The *rani* entertained the Brahmin as it was customary. Well fed, the Brahmin reclined and slept on the bed of the *raja*. When the king returned, he saw a stranger in his bed chamber. He struck him with his sword wounding him on the hand which started bleeding. The Brahmin revealed his real identity to the king and ordered him to shift to Baijnath. The wounded hand of the idol started waning and still continues to do so. One day, the hand will fall off. That would be the day of closure of the Badrinath shrine which well shift to Bhavishya Badri.

From Joshimath, a road takes us direct to Badrinath passing through Vishnu Prayag, Gobindghat, Pandukeshwar and Hanuman Chatti. The temple first comes into view at Dev Darshini or Dev Dakhini about 500 metres before Badrinathpuri. The golden dome of the temple with a saffron banner flying over it, offers a fine view against the background of the arid mountains.

The temple is closed in the second or third week of November. The *Utsava-Murti* is taken down and worshipped at Pandukeshwar. On the day of closure, the *Rawal* dresses up as Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, and requests the Lord to accompany her to the new house at Pandukeshwar. The ceremony is solemn but colourful. There are normally no *yatris* at this time of the year. The shrine re-opens around the first or the second week of May. Both the dates of closure and opening are decided by the Temple Committee after consulting the calenders and the high priests. The temple remains open during daytime except for a brief closure in the afternoon. The timings are varied according to the convenience of the pilgrims. As we are aware, there are five temples associated with Badrinath—called Panch Badri. The figure five has always had a special religious significance. Hindus have five main gods, *Panch Parmeshwar*, that is Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Ganesh and Shakti. There are also Panch Badri and Panch Kedar. Similarly there are five most sacred Prayags : Prayag Raj, Dev Prayag, Rudra Prayag, Vishnu Prayag and Karna Prayag.

As for Panch Badri, the five main temples associated with Badrinath are Raj Badri, Yog Badri, Dhyan Badri, Narasimha Badri and Bhavishya Badri. Narasimha Badri deserves our special attention. One arm of the idol Narasimha at Joshimath is growing thinner day by day. The day it falls off or disappears, the road to Badrinath will be closed by a landslide which will dam up the river Vishnu Ganga and the temple at Badrinath will get submerged in water. The place of the landside will be two miles before Gobindghat and has been named Patmila. Nar and Narayan will also join. The new temple at Bhavishya Badri near Tapoban will become the main shrine. Vishnu will descend as the *Kalki Avatar*. The *kaliyug* will end. *Satyug* will start again and the Badrinath Dham will be re-established. The *puja* ritual at the Narasimha Badri is of special interest.

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On the festival day, *puja* is performed by a man called *Dandariya*. The *Hurkiyas* sing and recount the whole story of Narasimha. When the climax is reached, the *Dandariya* starts trembling and roars like a lion. He attacks a goat tied outside the temple and kills it. He then takes raw meat, 22 seers of rice, one pitcher of water and one full cake of *gur*. People sitting around ofter rice to him. This super-human power is because of the entry of Narasimha in his body. At last he falls down which signifies that the deity has left him. The ritual comes to an end.

Pandukeshwar is the site of Jog Badri and serves as a winter residence of the *Utsava Murti*. You must visit this place in order to make your pilgrimage complete. The main idol of Badrinath and some of the treasures belonging to the Badrinath temple are kept here during winter. There are five famous copper plates in the temple. The inscription on one of them praises the great king Nimbarana for his grants of land to the temples in a most flowery language. The idol in the temple is life size and has been carved from the *saligram* stone. It is believed that it came down from the heavens.

The last of the Panch Badri is temple at Ad Badri, a halting place between Lobha and Karna Prayag. It is situated in the latitude 30°-9' and longitude 79°-16'-10'' at a distance of about 17 kilometres from Karna Prayag. It can also be reached from Narayan Bagar on river Pindari between Karna Prayag and Gwaldam. The tracks leading to the temple pass through beautiful scenery. Just above Ad Badri there are the ruins of 16 temples. One temple is dedicated to Badrinarayan. On shifting of Raj Badri to Bhavishya Badri, Ad Badri will become Jog Badri. The other temples at Ad Badri are neglected and almost in ruins. All these temples are situated in a small space of about 14 metres by 30 metres. The principal temple is distinguished by a raised platform. All buildings are in decay and hardly any one ever visits there. The *pujari* lives on alms by the local people.

And now let us get back to Badrinath. There are five sacred rocks—*Panch Shila*—at Badrinath on which various gods and ascetics meditated to appease Vishnu. They are embedded in the Vishnu Ganga and are called Narad Shila, Brahi Shila, Narasimha Shila, Markandeya Shila and Garuda Shila. Narad Shila is the largest and is just below *tapta kund*. The water under this *shila* is called Narad Kund.

The area around the temple offers greater attractions to the visitor for it is full of legends. The first on the list is Mana, the village that claims to have witnessed the composition of the epic, *Mahabharata*. Badrinath was also called Manibhadra Ashram from which the word 'Mana' is derived. There are many caves around the village—mainly Vyas *gupha*, Ganesh *gupha* and Muchhukund *gupha*.

Rishi Vyas composed the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagvata* at Mana. He lived in Vyas *gupha* over which there is a massive rock, resembling the

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leaves of a book: It is called *Vyas Pustaka* or *Gita* at times. Ganesh, who was the scribe of Vyas lived in another cave nearby. It is called Ganesh *gupha*.

Ved Vyas had his *ashram* near Keshav Prayag at the confluence of the Saraswati and the Vishnu Ganga. A number of ancient sages spent years, meditating in the region. Keshav Prayag is therefore, also called Vyas Prayag at times.

A word about the two streams meeting at Keshav Prayag: The Vishnu Ganga is formed by five streams gushing out of the Alkapuri glaciers. The confluence of the Satopanth and the Bhagirath glaciers descending from Badrinath and Satopanth peaks is called Alkapuri. There is a belief that the river trickles down from the feet of the *Vaman avatar* of Vishnu. After about 18 kilometres, the Vishnu Ganga is joined by the Saraswati at Keshav Prayag. The Vishnu Ganga thereafter runs its tumultous course further down and touches Badrinathpuri. The Vishnu Ganga is joined by the Dhauli at Vishnu Prayag and the combined stream is called the Alaknanda. Having accepted the tributes of the Nandakni, the Pindari and the Mandakini, the Alaknanda loses her own identity after joining the Bhagirathi at Dev Prayag. At Prayag, the Ganga is joined by the Yamuna and the subterranean, Saraswati. Hence this place is known as Triveni. This brings us to the Saraswati which joins the Vishnu Ganga near Badrinath.

The *Mahabharata* invokes the blessings of both the sages Nar and Narayan and the divine Saraswati. According to the legend, the Saraswati was also born in Himachal. After entering the Sapta Sindhu or Punjab, it flowed near the famous pilgrim centre at Kurukshetra in the south-westerly direction and then passed into the Rajasthan area. According to some geologists, as a result of the upheaval of the Himalayas and other great geological changes which accompanied, the Saraswati lost is principal drainage and most of her tributaries to the Yamuna. It gradually disappeared from view. It is believed that the sacred tank at Pushkar, near Ajmer, was in the bed of the Saraswati. The Ghaggar river in Haryana near Chandigarh and the Luni river in Rajasthan are thought to be the remains of the original Saraswati. The Aryans had settled on the banks of this river. She was considered to be the goddess of learning and also named Jananswaroopini. The Aryans were proud of this great river. The *Vedas* were revealed and written on the banks of the Saraswati by a class of Pandits whose descendants came to be called 'Saraswati Brahmins'. The Aryans, therefore, could not take favourably to the disappearance of the river. The popular belief is that the Saraswati went underground. The belief that the Saraswati flows unperceived underground right upto Prayag where it joins Ganga and Yumuna at Triveni Sangam still lingers. Curiously enough, the imperceptible course of the Saraswati has been vaguely alluded to in the *Mahabharata*. Research reveals that the Saraswati was a perennial stream which helped agriculture tremendously and had flourishing human settle-

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ments. There are references to the great sacred river in the *Rig Veda*, the *Manusmriti* and the *Mahabharata*. Recent archaeological works support its existence. At one time, this river was undoubtedly great in dimension and had supported about one lakh people who had settled in its valley. It is the opinion of some geologists that the process of dislocation was completed somewhere between the first and fifth century b.c. All the same, the Saraswati flows in name if not in reality as many streams all over India carry this name. Hymns sung at the time of marriage refer to it.

Your womb Saraswati, the *trilok* framed
Wisdom and beauty from your name are named
Marriage is duty, it is womanhood's vow
Charming Saraswati, be though with us now.

Reverting to the Saraswati of Keshava Prayag, let us see if it has something to do with the great Vedic Saraswati. The Yamuna which captured most of her tributaries is merely 80 kilometres away. The *Mahabharata* was written on its banks and its name figures along with Nar and Narayan. The river originates from a place two kilometres from Mana pass, runs a course of 40 kilometres and then loses her identity to the Vishnu Ganga. The godless Saraswati is believed to roam on her banks. Just above the confluence, the Saraswati enters a tremendous gorge and descends more than 300 metres in less than hundred meters of its course. She disappears from view and only a few glimpses can be had descending through numerous cascades. The roar can be heard for miles around in the still Himalayan nights. Some of the Pandits tell you that the quantity of water entering the gorge is more than that emerging out near Keshav Prayag. There is therefore, a distinct possibility that the Saraswati of Mana has something to do with the Vedic Saraswati.

The temple of Mata Murti, mother of celestial sages, Nar and Narayan is located near Keshav Prayag. Normally every pilgrim who come to Badrinarayan also pays a vist to this small shrine. Every year, two days after *ashtami*, *puja* is conducted at this temple. The *Rawal*, along with hundreds of *yatris* is present to worship the goddess mother. Soon after the *puja*, a big fair is held which is a special attraction for children. The festival is supposed to go on till 3 p.m. but lingers on well into the evening. Villagers bring there own *ishta devatas* to the fair, duly covered behind yak tails and worship them.

Next to the temple, is a massive feature called Maninag Parvat. It is said that there was an enchanted pool near this mountain, controlled by a *yaksha*. Whenever any passerby came for water, the pond receded. The *yaksha* then appeared and roared that none could draw water till a few of his questions were answered. Those who could not answer were doomed and their souls imprisoned, The Pandavas passed this way on their trek to heaven. Dropadi felt thirsty. Yudhishthir asked all his brothers one by one

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to go and fetch water. None of them came back. Yudhishthir got suspicious and went himself. He could answer all the questions and not only drew water for Dropadi but also resurrected his brothers. This was test of his piety.

According to one legend, Badri Narayan was the chief deity in the monastery at Tolingmath. He was worshipped with lots of ostentations. Vishnu, however, did not like the immoral lives led by the Lamas and decided to flee. He escaped through a hole in the ceiling of the monastery got on to a horse called 'Shyamkarna' and made straight for the sanctuary of Nar and Narayan Parvat. The head Lama came to know and chased the fugitive. Vishnu hid behind the tail of a yak grazing along the banks of the Saraswati. The yak tail which gave shelter to him was blessed and came to be honoured in religious shrines. Vishnu reached Mana gorge on his 'Shyamkarna' horse. Throughout this long and tedious journey, he was chased by demons sent by the Lama. At Mana, the horse disturbed Rishi Madhakta who cursed him. The horse vanished and today only an impression of the 'Shyamkarna' horse is visible on a huge rock on the right bank of Saraswati. Knowing the fate of his favourite steed, Vishnu wept. The weeping eye '*sheshnetra*' can be seen even today. The tears filled two ponds which always remind us about Badri Narayan's horse and his love for his faithful friend. Badri Narayan then settled down at Garun Kuti cave where the temple now stands.

A little beyond Mana is Machhukund *gupha* which has its own story. Rishi Machhander sat for *tapasya* at this spot. His comtemporary was a demon called Kalyawan. He was a devotee of Vishnu who had granted him the power to kill anybody on Earth. Kalyawan had coveted Vishnu's throne and first of all tried to kill him. Vishnu had to flee towards this cave to spare himself from the ungrateful demon. Even to-day, the clear impression of Vishnu's feet '*charan paduka*' can be seen at the entrance of the cave, Rishi Machhander came to his rescue. When Kalyawan entered his cave, he got annoyed and destroyed the tresspasser by casting a fiery look. The bones of the demon were turned into stones called Kalfang. People of Mana do not use the stones from this site for constructing houses because they believe that such constructions are doomed. During 1968, an avalanche destroyed some houses in which some police personnel perished. The entire blame was put on Kalyawan's bones that had inadvertently gone into the construction of these houses.

Now let us turn left and follow the path treaded by the Pandavas in their ascent to heaven. The Pandavas came to Mana on their way to Alkapuri. Dropadi could not cross Saraswati. Bhim threw a rock over Saraswati to bridge the river. The rock bridge is still in existence and is called Bhim Shila or Bhim pul. Such exploits of men of unusual might are common even now. There is for example one Sudhakar Bhim of Kurukshetra who at the age of 42 can break an iron chain with his hands. He is able to hold back two cars moving in opposite directions proving that the

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strength in each of his arms is more than 14 horse power. He can also drive nails into wood with his fists. He claims that *hath yoga* helps his muscles to perform these feats of unusual strength. He is capable of letting an eight ton road-roller go over his chest! In the light of this, the Bhim bridge is no wonder at all.

Approximately, three kilometres from Bhim *pul* are Vasudhara falls where the Pandavas are said to have had a bath. The waterfall is more than 125 metres high and is one of the major falls in not only Uttarakhand but whole of India. Situated at a height of 4,000 metres, it is set in picturesque surroundings. Rishi Vasu meditated here in search of salvation. The water is believed to come from Alkapuri, the mythological capital of Kuber. The water splashes over a large area but no drop ever falls on a man of impure thoughts. Even the very sight of an impure person is said to stop the flow. When the British attacked Garhwal, the *raja* visited Badrinath to invoke the help of Vishnu. On his arrival at Vasudhara, the fall of water stopped which was a bad omen and everyone knew the outcome of battle.

Moving up along the Vishnu Ganga, we reach the seven steps of *Swarga Rohini*—the natural heavenly ladder followed by the Pandavas. Those observing fast for three days at *Swarga Rohini* are honoured by a *darshan* of Vishnu. Trudging on, at a distance of about 25 kilometres from Vasudhara, we come across a beautiful glacial lake. There is no track and one has to move on the glacial morains. The Pandavs are said to have passed through this place on their way to heaven. The lake is called *sontalab* by the Bhotias. It is triangular in shape and resembles a *yoni*, the female genital. It is situated at the confluence of the Satopanth and the Bhagirath glaciers and is also called Satyapath or the true path. Just short of the lake is Lakshmiban with a jungle of *bhojpatra* trees. The area between Lakshmiban and Satyapath lake is studded with 16 springs of crystal clear water. It is a lunar landscape with not a soul around. The best view of the Badrinath peaks is obtained from this side. At the other side is the famous Gangotri glacier. Satyapath is as holy as Ganga for Bhotias and the ashes of their dead are assigned to it. It is said that the lake is fathomless and that no bird can ever fly across. The lake seems to serve as a drinking place for a number of animals. At times coveys of snow cock are seen in the area. The Bhotias make offerings at the lake to keep the passes open and aid them in their dangerous treks.

About a kilometre beyond Satyapath is another small glacial lake called Vishnu Kund. Along this lake is Chakra Tirtha, the place where Bhim perished. Having visited Satyapath lake after a difficult trek, we have no need to go beyond. In any case, we cannot go, though we are very near Kedarnath peak behind which lies the famous shrine to Kedarnath. It is believed that in the ancient times, some *Pujari* used to worship at both the shrines, Badrinath as well as Kedarnath. He took less than an hour to cover the

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distance through on underground tunnel.

Coming back to Mana, we are told that the village is without reptiles though at this height, in other places they are found. Once two poisonous snakes were coming towards the village. Ghantakarana stopped them near Bhrigu *gupha* and destroyed both of them. Today, travellers can easily spot the impressions of the snakes on a big stone near Bhrigu *gupha.*

Ghantakarana is the guardian *devata* of Mana and is worshipped by the Bhotias as their own *ishta devata.* The deity acts as *dwarapal* (gate keeper) and *kshetrapal* (house keeper) of Badrinath. His image is outside the temple. Ghantakarana also acts as *dwarapal* in front of many Shiva temples. Some worship the deity as an incarnation of Ganesh. In the remote villages, Ghantakarana is worshipped in the form of a water jar at the time of the harvest. A separate temple of Ghantakaran is located enroute to *Swarga Rohni.* The Mana *nivasis* offer prayers there. Their faith in the benevolence of this deity is very strong. During winter; when the residents migrate to lower villages of Naigwad, Ghingram and Gopeshwar, four men stay back to offer prayers to the icon of Ghantakarana. The deity is belived to cure skin diseases. Once in every 12 years, the Vishnu Ganga brings huge logs of wood for Ghantakarana. The logs are invariably washed up on the shore near Keshav Prayag. This is a signal for the villagers to move out with drums in a procession to collect the wood which is utilised for worship at the temple of Ghantakarna.

Next we come to Brahmakapal and there is an interesting legend about it. Brahma got infatuated by his own young daughter Saraswati, who was a woman unsurpassed in beauty. Overtaken by shame at the profanity of her father, Saraswati disappeared under ground from where she now emerges at Triveni. Shiva could not stand the depravity and chopped off the fifth head of Brahma which stuck to his *trishul.* So it remained for many years. Shiva was relieved of his burden as he came to Badrika Ashram and made his home here till ousted by Vishnu. The temple of Kedareshwar now stands where Shiva once lived. It is belived that for salvation of the departed souls, Brahmakapal is the highest shrine for performance of *sharddh.* Not only does the soul go straight to heaven, the relatives of the deceased are absolved of the annual performance of *sharaddh.* In addition, 21 generations of the family are purified.

As we proceed towards Keshav Prayag from Badrinath, we also come across Bhrigu *gupha.* Bhrigu, the great sage with a unique capability of forecasting the future, worshipped Vishnu at this place. Further up, we come across Indradhara where Indra, the king of gods and ruler of heaven did *tapasaya.*

A place which may not be easily visited but can be seen is an ice wall made of perennial snows on the slopes of Nar Parvat. Kuber, the god of riches kept his Kuber *bhandar* under this wall. There is a popular belief

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that the mountain contains precious stones like diamonds, rubies and emeralds. *Mani*, the most precious stone being guarded by a *nag*, is also kept in Kuber *bhandar*.

Badrinath is situated under the shadow of the beautiful peak Neelkantha. It has been called the queen of Garhwal hills by most visitors, mountaineers and explorers. Barely 10 kilometres away from Badrinath to the south-west, the mountain resembles the map of India. Standing in solitary splendour, the imposing massif shares its name with Shiva. As the story goes in *Satyuga*, there was that inevitable mythological fight between *devatas* and *danavas*. At one stage it was decided to churn the seas. The mountain, Mandrachal was used as a churning rod and Vasuki *nag* was the pulling rope. Churning produced nine precious stones, the *navratna*. The decision was tilting in favour of the *devatas* but Vasuki *nag* tried to play a trick. He secretly mixed venom in the churn. Shiva, the all-seeing, saw this with his third eye and felt that the life of all *devatas* was in danger. Hence he drank the entire venom which collected in his throat and turned into blue. Shiva came to be called *Neelkantha* or the blue throated one. According to local tradition, a *rishi* volunteered to get all the venom transferred to his own throat. Shiva blessed him and said that he would be an object of veneration next to his own abode.

At the base of Neelkantha, impressions of Shri Badrinath's feet can be seen on a rock. *Bhagwan bhog* is required to be prepared here with water coming out of a crystal clear spring which is nearby. This *charan paduka* is about two kilometres from Badrinath. The path beyond leads to Urvashi Kund. It is a difficult treck through a maze of rocks and moraine. As per legend, Narayan sat here for *tapasya*. Indra, the traditional corrupter of *rishis*, felt the power of the *yogi* increasing beyond a safe margin. So he employed his well known trick of sending pretty *apsaras* to distract the ascetic. The girls started dancing and casting lustful glances at the *yogi*. Narayan could see through all this and opened his eyes. He bared his left thigh and out came a beautiful girl who was called Urvashi or the *mind born*. Narayan asked the *apsaras* to go back to Indra and take Urvashi also with them. Seeing the invincible might of the ascetic, they bowed in reverence and meekly returned to their king. Urvashi Kund, the site of this incident, is set in beautiful surrounding with hosts of wild flowers. There are vast beds of balsam growing in wild profusion.

A concrete road now reaches you within a hundred metres of the temple. Your devotion is now put to test. An old Bhotia saying has that 'the road that leads to Badrinath, requires ten men to lead nine goats.' Even at that difficult time, more than fifty thousand pilgrims visited every year. This number was more than doubled every twelfth year at *kumbh mela*. Up to Hanuman Chatti, the road is open throughout the year except for temporary road blocks during Monsoon. The road from Hanuman Chatti to

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Badrinath is open only during summer months from April to November and gets blocked by snow and avalanches during winter. Though the Monsoons are never heavy, it starts raining in the middle of June. The rains continue up to the middle of September. The skies normally remain cloudy. There is no dearth of water. All streams have potable water. The area falls in the snow belt and it snows quite heavily during winters every year. Normally the snowfall starts in November and continues till April. The snowfall is heaviest between January and March. The snow accumulates to about two metres though the heaviest recorded is three metres. The area is prone to avalanches which invariably occur every year. Just before Badrinath, we come across a monument to a Gorkha soldier who died in February 1971 in an avalanche.

The best time for a visit is before or after the Monsoon, though the latter is better because of greater scenic beauty and a washed green look that the hills acquire after the rains.

And now a word about the management of the temple. The head priest is called 'Rawal'. Till the Badrinath Act of 1939, more of which will be noted thereafter, the Rawal had a regular establishment of employees, secretaries and treasurers to help him manage the wealth of the institution. Under the former *rajas*, the Rawal exercised supreme and uncontrolled authority in the villages attached to the temple. The shrine, notwithstanding its extraordinary property and offerings, was far from being rich. The whole paraphernalia including ornaments, dresses, gold and silver utensils, etc. did not exceed five thousand rupees in value as reported by Mr. E.T. Atkinson in 1866. As some explanation of this comparative poverty, it may be stated that during the Gorkha invasion of Garhwal, the *raja* took jewels and other items worth Rs. 5,000 as a loan from the temple which were never returned. From all records and accounts, the main temples in Uttarakhand should have been fabulously rich. It was customary for the benevolent rulers to endow land and villages to various temples. In 1824, the Badrinath Dham possessed 226 villages, 56 in Kumaon and 170 in Garhwal from which the revenue was Rs. 2,000 a year in 1864, the temple had 262 village in Garhwal and 69 in Kumaon. In addition, thousands of devotees made offering in cash and kind. In spite of this, the temple could hardly ever make both ends meet. Where did all this money go? There were many who benefited from this illegally. Some *rajas* with lax morals, of which sort there were many, frequently made use of the temple property and at times even misappropriated it. Since their annual expenditure mostly exceeded their yearly income, they took loans to be repaid from the surplus from favourable years. Offerings consisted of food and clothing of the deity and *nazarana* or gift to the Rawal. Generally, entire amounts were taken as *nazarana* by the Rawal thus leaving the temple in perpetual debt. The Rawals made it convenient to amass vast fortunes

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and after retirement lived in luxurious comfort. No account was ever kept of the properties and pilferage was the rule rather than the exception. Once some bad characters hazarded the snows in winter and stole more than 40 kilograms of gold and silver vessels. They were, however, captured and punished. But how many burglaries and pilferings went unnoticed? Who knows?

Matters have now been controlled to a major extent. But they are still far from being ideal. I think the most important measure is that the Rawal, must be selected with utmost care. During my visit to Badrinath which number to about 20 during the period of 1970 to 1974, I had the privilege of meeting the Rawal more than once. I have no hesitation in admitting my disillusionment at the lack of any spiritual awakening in this head priest. My first two encounters with him were during September and November 1970. I fixed the appointment for five o'clock and reached there as per military standard, five minutes before time. He was asleep. Ultimately his holiness appeared yawning. In spite of the irritants of official control, he had fed well. He had aged prematurely because of over-indulgence. I had gone prepared for a religious discourse. His holiness, however, started his own tales of woe. That was the year of the havoc caused by the Alaknanda in July 1970. Roads had got blocked and the number of pilgrims was less than a quarter of the normal number. Hence, the Rawal's private income from *nazarana* was very low. This, however, was not the only reason. According to his holiness, the disturbing factor was also, the generally low quality of pilgrims! Wealthy and well-to-do pilgrims would naturally not hazard any physical discomfort by resorting to trekking during such harsh climes. The way the holy man put it, "Alaknanda *mata* has got annoyed with us poor people. She has blocked the route of the *premi bhagat log*."

During my second visit to the *holy* man, he tried to discuss 'current affairs.' The abolition of the privy purses and privileges of the princes was the most discussed topic then. There were open conjectures that the government action would fail. The Rawal's interest in the matter was quite worldly. More interesting was his approach to the problem. Some of the princes were his *premi bhagat log*. How could those beloved of the gods be humiliated? He was sure that this government would fall!

I did not meet him again even though he sent me a number of messages to look him up.

This is not the only drain on the otherwise holy vibrations of Badrinath Dham. The *pandas* can be quite a nuisance at times. It was decided in 1969-71 to bring hot water of the *tapta kund* to left bank of Alaknanda into the rest houses for pilgrims. It would have eased the pressure on the *kund* at peak hours and contributed to general cleanliness and sanitation of the area. But there was the fear that men might not pay *dakshina* to the *pandas*. Hence the *pandas* duly joined by the Rawal, broke the pipes and

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damaged the installations.

There have also been incidents of harassment of the pilgrims by other bad characters from time to time. During 1970, some vagabonds got around some women pilgrims and told them that there were some *sadhus* three hundred years old near Vasudhara. Enticing the ladies there, they, tried to rob and molest them. No wonder the *devatas* sent davastating rains and Alaknanda *mata* destroyed the sinners.

There have been numerous such incidents told at various times. It is, therefore, only correct to know some important provisions of the Badrinath Act which have been reproduced at the end of this chapter.

As a first step, it is necessary to trace the history of the *pujaris*. To the south of the Rishi Ganga is the village Bamni Goan. It is believed that a Brhamin by the name of Subrata or Salyabrata lived there. He dreamt that Badrinath was about to start living between the confluences of the Vishnu Ganga with the Saraswati and the Rishi Ganga. He was ordered by the Lord to proceed to the exact spot and start *puja*. He collected some *deodar* branches and started the *arati*. Since there was no other food for *bhog*, he collected some *phaphar* leaves, dried them, ground them, and prepared *bhog* for the deity. The custom of offering *phaphar* as *bhog* is still practised in *Kartik*. As the Brahmin grew old, he could not live in the snows and started seasonal migrations to Pandukeshwar during winter. The residence of this *pujari* is now named Bamni Goan. The inhabitants of Bamni Goan used to perform *pujas* here about six or seven centuries prior to the reinstating of the shrine by Adi Shankaracharya. These Brahmins are the Dimri Brahmins and still worship the deity as members of the Rawal's team. Hence, we have seen that the exclusive rights for *puja* at Badrinath rest with the Rawal, a Nambudri Brahmin and the Dimris of Bamni Gaon. It was never the holiest man, but men of fixed castes who were selected as the *pujaris*. This custom had a built-in scope for corruption. The Dimris are seen hovering at the temple. Shouts of "Come this way; this is the real *Bhagwan*! Come and meet Uddhavji" etc are common. Some Dimris sit to the right of the temple at the back next to the drainage of sanctorum. When the idol is given a bath, they collect the water in bottles and sell it as *charanamrit*. Sometimes the haggling over price gives the place a look of a fish market rather than a holy shrine. That much of the Dimris. Some exploits of the Rawals have been noted before. Here is a word about their history.

Shri Adi Shankaracharya had establisbed four *mathas* and appointed four of his disciples as the religious heads; Dwarika Puri was given to Swami Hastamalik, Jagannath Puri to Swami Padmapad, Rameswaram to Swami Rameswaram and Jyotirmath to Swami Totaka. The rules and regulations for the management of the *mathas* were laid down by Shri Shankaracharya in the book '*Mathanya*'. From 1497 A.D. to 1776 A.D. for

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which records are available, 21 *Acharyas* became Rawals and managed the affairs of the temples.

Overall management was handed over to the Maharaja of Tehri sometime in the eighteenth century. He was conferred the title of the *Boland Badri*, the living incarnation of Lord Badrinath. He started paying a regular tribute to Rawal with effect from 1776. The first recipient was one Gopal. Even when the actual temple came under British Garhwal, the affairs of the temple continued to be under the Maharaja of Tehri. The selection of the Rawal was made jointly by the rajas of Travancore and Tehri. As the powers of the *maharaja* got restricted, due to British ascendancy, the Rawals exploited the situation and became absolute rulers of the estate of Badrinath. They became corrupt and huge amounts were spent on their personal luxury and sensuous pleasures. An effort was made to improve the situation but no effective control was ever exercised. The Rawals became self-willed. From 1776 A.D. to 1893 A.D., 11 Rawals presided over the temple. The tenth Rawal, one Vasudeva, fell in love with a Brahmin girl who came for *puja* and married her. The matter went to the court in 1898 A.D. and as per the judgement of the court, the Rawal was given absolute power. Tehri state could only appoint a Naib Rawal. This dual control added to conflicts of which there was no dearth in any case. From 1916 to 1919, a manager was appointed by the Commissioner of Kumaon in consultation with Tehri state and the Rawal. The manager was one Shri Saligram Vaishnava. A dent was made in the freedom of the Rawal who naturally become non-cooperative, so much so that the manager had to be withdrawn. The Tehri state felt that the management of the temple could not improve till the temple came under jurisdiction of the state. A popular movement was, therefore, organized. The Rawal stage-managed a counter movement which took mammoth proportions and the proposal to place the temple under Tehri was dropped.

During 1928, the Government of United Provinces appointed a committee for investigating the religious matters of the Hindus of the province. The Committee consulted leading persons about the Badrinath and Kedarnath temples and gave their report to the provincial government. They found the management very unsatisfactory. At that time, the grant of provincial autonomy to the states was under consideration. It was, therefore, decided to take the management of the temples under the state government rather than pass it on to Tehri.

Sir Jwalaprasad said in a speech on the occasion of the conference of the U.P. *Dharma Rakshini Sabha* that the Government was anxious to bring in reforms in the temples of the province. He also brought up a bill. A committee was formed under the parliamentary secretary Acharya Jugal Kishore to study the bill. The Hindu public insisted on preparation of a special bill and requested for forming a separate committee for dealing with

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these matters. Fortunately, the chief minister of U.P., Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant was a member of the U.P. Hindu Religious Society. He was approached and requested by all leading institutions to make immediate improvements to end the scheme of things since 1899 by a special enactment. Consequently the Badrinath Temple Act was passed on November 3, 1939. The Deputy Collector, Shri Partap Singh Chauhan, was appointed Special Officer in accordance with Sectian 27 of the Act. He took over charge from the Rawal, Pandit Basudeo Nambudiri. It may be of interest that at that time there were Rs. 143 in cash with a debt of Rs. 14,000. The office of the Special Officer lasted from April 1940 to January 1941. In the month of February 1941 as per Section 5 of the Badrinath Temple Act, a committee was formed. There were forty thousand pilgrims that year. The temple accounts showed a surplus and have never been in the red again.

SOME IMPORTANT PROVISIONS OF SHRI BADRINATH TEMPLE ACT, 1939 (U.P.)

(As amended by 1964 Amendment Act)

Temples affiliated to Shri Badrinathji

The act covers the main temple, Shri Lakshmiji Temple, the images of Garur, Hanumanji, Ghantakarana and other images at Badrinath. The following temples are covered under this act,

(a) Shri Shankaracharya Temple at Badrinath.
(b) Shri Adi Kedareshwar Temple at Badrinath.
(c) Shri Ballabhacharya Temple at Badrinath.
(d) Tapta Kund, the tank and the hot spring at Badrinath.
(e) Brahmakapal, the Shila and the compound (Parikrama) of Badrinath.
(f) Mata Murti Temple at Badrinath.
(g) Yog Badri Temple at Pandukeshwar.
(h) Bhavishya Badri Temple at Subhain, Tapoban.
(i) Narsimha Temple at Joshimath.
(j) Basudev Temple at Joshimath.
(k) Shri Durga Temple at Joshimath.
(l) Rajrajeshwari Temple at Joshimath.
(m) Mahadeva Temple at Joyteshwar.
(n) Bhaktabasal Temple at Joyteshwar.
(o) Narayan Temple at Vishnu Prayag.
(p) Sita Devi Temple at Chain.
(q) Vridh Badri Temple at Animath.

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(r) Dhyan Badri Temple at Urgam.
(s) Shri Narsimha Temple at Pakhi.
(t) Shri Narsimha Temple at Darıni.
(u) Shri Lakshminarayan Temple at Nand Parayag.
(v) Shri Lakshminarayan Temple at Kulsarsi.
(w) Shri Lakshminarayan Temple at Gudsir, Almora.
(x) Shri Lakshminarayan Temple at Bayala, Almora.
(y) Panch Shilas within the Badrinathpuri.
(z) Panch Dharas within the Badrinathpuri.
(aa) Dharam Shila within the Parikrama of Shri Badrinath Temple.
(bb) Vasudhara and Dharam Shila at the bottom of the fall at Vasudhara.

Puja Bye-laws

(a) The temple shall remain open from 6 a.m. to 12 noon and 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. The usual morning and evening *puja* with offerings of *bhog* shall be done by the Rawal, and in his absence by the Naib Rawal within these hours. When there is a rush of pilgrims, the secretary may keep the temple open for such longer hours as he may deem fit to enable all pilgrims to get *darshan* of the deity everyday.

(b) In case any employee fails in the discharge of his duties the secretary may punish him which may include fine.

(c) Pilgrims or other persons shall be allowed to do prayer within the precincts of the Temple only with the permission of the secretary.

(d) Persons wishing to perform *Abhishekham*, *Sahasranama*, *Ashtottri Archana*, *Arati* and other special *pujas* shall be required to give timely notice to the secretary and shall deposit the requisite amount in the office so that necessary arrangements may be made in time. All possible facilities shall be given to the pilgrims to perform these special *pujas* and seating arrangement shall be made for such pilgrims as not to interfere in the ordinary *darshan* by other pilgrims.

(e) Pilgrims making such offering as *Thail-Bhet* to the deity shall put it in the slotted box placed inside the Temple. Ordninarily they should offer cash in the office and obtain a receipt therefor.

(f) The Officer-in-Charge of the *Thali-Bhet* shall see that all the articles offered to the deity are carefully placed in the box and if so required by the pilgrims he will issue a receipt of the valuables offered at the time of *darshan.* Ordinarily pilgrims should have the valuable articles weighed in the office and obtain receipt therefor from the *Likhwar*. No articles shall be accepted by the Rawal, Naib Rawal or the Barwa or any other office or right holder from the pilgrims directly for being offered to the deity without the permission of the officer-in-charge of the *Thali-Bhet.*

(g) No persons, other than those whose right to receive gifts specifically

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recognised by the Committee, shall receive any gift in any form within the precincts of the Temple. The employees of the temple shall not receive or solicit for any remuneration, reward or *dakshina* in any form from pilgrims.

(h) No person connected with the daily *puja* or *bhog* in the Temple or its subordinate shall participate in the *puja* if he is in *ashauch* (unwashed) or suffers from any contagious or infectious disease.

(j) The person performing the *puja* and the *Bhitala Berwe* shall be responsible for the safe custody of the jewellery and other gold and silver articles entrusted to them for use in the daily *puja* or on occasions of festivals and the *Shringari* shall be responsible for the safety of clothes. If any article or cloth is found missing, the person concerned shall be liable to make good the loss. Jewellery and other articles of gold or silver no longer wanted for *puja* shall be returned to the double-lock.

(k) No pilgrim shall be compelled to make any offerings to any deity in the temple against his wishes.

(l) The pilgrim shall have free access to the tapta kund, Narad Kund, Gauri Kund and other places of bathing and may bathe in them.

(m) No *panda* shall harass any pilgrim for uttering *suphal* and he shall accept the amount willingly given by the pilgrim for this purpose. If any pilgrim complains against any *panda* for harassment, the secretary shall if the complaint is substantiated after an investigation, deal with him in such manner as he thinks fit and may by an order debar such *panda* from entering the precincts of the Temple for a period which may extend to one year. Such an order shall be appealable to the Committee within a period of thirty days from the date of the order.

(n) The *purohit* at Brahmakapal shall conduct the *pind* ceremony when asked to do so by any pilgrim and shall accept the *dakshina* willingly given by him. If there is a complaint of harassment against any *purohit*, the secretary may take the same action against him as against a *panda* under the last preceding rule and the *purohits* shall have the same right of appeal as a *panda* has thereunder.

(o) No *sadhu* or beggar shall beg or sit for begging for alms within the precincts of the Temple.

(p) Pilgrims desirous of making any payment to the servants or any individual servant of the Committee, may do so through the secretary.

From the foregoing it is evident that the laws are meant for the betterment of the administration and the well-being of the pilgrims. Any default on the part of the employees should be brought to the notice of the secretary or reported in writing to the president of the Committee.

In case any one promises to take you to the sages Vyas and Ashwatthama, just report him to police!

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PUJA SEWAS IN SHRI BADRINATH TEMPLE

The following are the schedules for *puja sewas* in Shri Badrinath Temple. *Puja* may be registered one day before the performance :—

		Rs.
1.	Maha Abhisheka	501
2.	Abhisheka	151
3.	Bhagwat-Gita Path	51
4.	Vishnu Sahasranamawali	25
5.	Vishnu Sahasranam Path	15
6.	Ashtottri	10
7.	Geeta Govind	21
8.	Swarna Arati	31
9.	Chandi ki Arati (large)	15
10.	Chandi ki Arati (small)	7
11.	Karpur Arati	3
12.	Atka (ordinary)	25
13.	Atka (special)	51
14.	Pinda Prasada	2
15.	Bhog	5
16.	Gaddi Bhaint	1 or more
17.	Nitya Niyam Bhog (of Badrinath)	162
18,	Veda Path	101
19.	Shrimad Bhagwat Path	501
20.	Shrimad Bhagwat Path (for three weeks)	1001
21.	Rudra Abhisheka in the Temple of Shri Adikedareshwar after the month of Shravan	1001
22.	Urvashi Puja	701
23.	Janmashtmi Utsava	501
24.	Mata Murti Utsava	261
25.	Nitya Niyam Bhog	261

Rates for Perpetual Puja

		Rs.
1.	Maha Bhog of Shri Badrinath	3000
2.	Bal Bhog of Shri Badrinath	500
3.	Abhisheka of Shri Badrinath	5000
4.	Namawali	600
5.	Sahsranama Archna	300
6.	Ashtottri	200
7.	Swarna Arati	500
8.	Karpur or Mangal Arati	100

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19

The Sikh Shrines

Paonta Sahib

THE SIKH shrines of historic importance in Uttarakhand comprise Paonta Sahib, Hemkunt Sahib, Ritha Sahib and Darbar Sahib at Dehra Dun. Paonta Sahib is situated in the foot-hills of the Nag Tibba Range in Nahan district of Himachal Pradesh. Strictly speaking, the shrine does not fall within the geographical boundaries of Uttarakhand. Traditionally, however, it is inextricably connected with other *gurdwaras* of Uttarakhand and it is only proper to include it in our present study. It is famous for the fort built by the tenth Guru Shri Govind Singh and the museum containing some of *guruji's* personal weapons. The shrine is situated on the right bank of the Yamuna which roars down on its tumultuous course. Wonder of wonders, the noise does not seem to penetrate into the building. Inside the *gurdwara* it is all calm and quiet. It may well be the acoustics or the miraculous consideration by nature. Devotees feel the latter to be true. The nearest railway station at present is Jagadhari, 30 kilometres away. The shrine may be reached via Jagadhari or Dehra Dun by bus or car.

The area around Paonta Sahib has been the scene of a lot of historical and mythological activity. Shiva was enlightened here when he descended from Kailash Parvat. Goddess Durga passed this way to reach Indra in his hour of need. Nearby is the Renuka Tal, named after the mother of Parasuram. The *ashram* of Rishi Markandeya, where he had prayed for salvation, is located on the bank of river Markandeya at a distance of about 30 kilometres from Paonta Sahibi. Rishi Vyas too had visited this place and had his *ashram* about eight kilometres to the north-west of the shrine. Qila Lohgarh; the capital of Baba Banda Bahadur Bairagi, where he started *Khalsa* coin for the first time, is situated at a distance of 25 kilometres from Paonta Sahib.

Fateh Shah, the raja of Garhwal, had usurped some land of Medini Prakash, the ruler of Sirmur. Medini Prakash consulted his *rajguru*, Rishi Kalpi, who advised him to seek shelter of the tenth *guru* of the Sikh

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Panth Medini sent his minister, Sobha Ram, with an application to Anandpur Sahib. The *Guru Maharaj* accepted the invitation and immediately set out from Anandpur Sahib. He was then barely sixteen and a half years of age. On arrival at Paonta, he summoned Raja Fateh Shah and arranged for a reconciliation. The Yamuna was declared as the boundary between the two neighbouring states.

The scenic setting of Paonta attracted *Guruji* so much that he spent four and a half years here. This time was fully devoted in educating and awakening the masses and uplifting the downtrodden. *Guruji* wrote the *Dasam Granth* up to the incarnation of Lord Krishna at Paonta, about 10,000 *chhandas*, out of the total 16,000 *chhandas*, were written at this holy spot. Forty-six famous poets of the day were given shelter here. He educated the illiterate which enabled one Dhanna Singh, a grass cutter to defeat, Chandan, a well-known poet of the day in a symposium. He also taught the art of war to his disciples. The Paonta fort was built in an area of about hundred acres on the pattern of the Anandpur Sahib.

Baba Ram Rai, the religious head of the Udasi Sikhs visited *Guruji* at Paonta. A little of the history of Babaji has been given in 'Pravesh'. The rest follows. Baba Ram Rai sent a message to *Guru Maharaj* and expressed a desire to meet him. The meeting took place at a distance of about five kilometres from Paonta. Baba Ram Rai give up his claim to the Sikh *gaddi*. This act reportedly irked his followers who plotted against him and immolated him whilst he was sitting in *samadhi*. After this tragic event, Mata Punjab Kaur, the wife of Baba Ram Rai solicited help of the *guru* who reached Dehra Dun and punished the miscreants.

Guruji left Paonta after the battle of Bhangani. The daughter of Raja Fateh Shah had been engaged to the son of Raja Bhim Chand who was in the good books of Aurangzeb. The Moghul emperor used the good offices of Bhim Chand and encouraged Fateh Shah to pick up a quarrel with the *Guruji* to sow seeds of dissent for political purposes. In this context, the *Guruji* wrote in his autobiography, *Vichitra Natak*.

Fateh Shah kopa tab raja
Loh paraa hum so bin kaja
Fateh Shah got annoyed and
Took up fight with me without any reason.

The ensuing battle was fought at Bhangani at a distance of ten kilometers from Paonta. The *guru's* army consisted of about four thousand men while the enemy numbered more than twenty five thousand. Losses were heavy on both sides. One notable event was that the Muslim *Pir* Buddhu Shah of Sadhaur fought on *Guruji's* side. Another highlight of the battle indicating *Guruji's* inspiring leadership was that Lal Chand, a *halwai* by trade, joined with *khoncha* and fought with conspicuous gallantry! Baba Kirpal Udasi, a mendicant also took rt in the battle and killed many a foe

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including Sardar Hayat Khan. The battle lasted 30 days. Fateh Shah lost.

The *gurdawara* has been built at the spot where the *Guruji* dismounted from his horse on his arrival. Originally it was built by Sanghnewalia *Sardars*. The present splendid construction has been put up by the Constructions Committee of the devotees of Dehra Dun and Paonta Sahib. A major portion of the funds were provided by the Maharaja of Patiala. The building has 10 doors, four inner, five outer and one secret hidden door which can only be noticed by the experienced devotees. Pilgrim facilities are being added every year. There are now 65 single rooms fitted with electric fans. About five hundred people can be accommodated. *Guru-ka-langar* functions all the year round providing free food.

Of the holy places having associations with *Guru Maharaj*, Talab Asthan served as his armoury and treasury. Here, he conducted *darbars* and distributed pay to the Sikhs. Shri Kavi Darbar Asthan where *Guruji* held inspiring poetic symposiums is another place worth visiting. Sri Dastar Asthan is a wonderful sight on a hillock with a beautiful view of the Yamuna and surrounding landscape. *Guruji* wore his ceremonial turban here and held evening prayers. The Dashmesh Kund served as his bathing place. The memorial of Rishi Kalpi should also be visited. *Guruji* brought Kalpi to Paonta in a palanquin and he spent the rest of his life in the shelter of the Guru Baba Kirpal. Udasi's *shila* is about half a kilometre away.

Since 1957, an impressive museum has been added where the weapons of Shri Gobind Singhji are on display. Some of the weapons were got back from England. A sword (*Sri Sahib*) presented by the *Guruji* to Raja Medini Prakash is still with the royal family of Sirmoor. On special occasions, it is brought for display.

Of the religious functions, the birth day of *Guruji*, Baisakhi and Hola Mohalla (*Holi*) are celebrated. The best time for a visit, therefore, depends on the devotees and their preferences. In case it be intended to pay a quiet homage, the occasions mentioned above may be avoided. Otherwise the shrine may be visited on any of the above functions. The visit should preferably be on a *puranamashi*.

HEMKUNT SAHIB

LOOKING around other Sikh shrines, we next come to Shri Hemkunt Sahib. The road head for this shrine is Gobind Ghat. The old name of Gobindghat was Samota. It was rechristened as Shri Gobindghat, in 1934, so as to serve as a base for the onward journey to Hemkunt Sahib.

The literal meaning of Hemkund is 'lake of ice'. The lake is situated in Zaskar Range, in the lap of seven high peaks which are reflected in the water on a clear day. The shrine is located on the bank of Hem kund. It is accessible only for about four months in a year from mid-June to mid-October. Rest of the year, it is covered by snow. Even during summer,

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huge ice fields are seen tucked away in the shady corners. The very word *Hemkund* conjures visions of awe-inspiring snow-clad mountains and the chilly silence of still waters. Nights are cold and a thick layer of ice crust is formed at the surface of the lake. The place must have for centuries lured mendicants desirous of pondering over the secrets and mysteries of life. It is said that Shri Guru Gobind Singhji, the founder of the Khalsa Panth, meditated on the bank of this lake in his earlier life as Rishi Bishala who was also known as Rishi Medhasa and Madhakta. A mention of this *rishi* is made in *Markandeya Purana*. While performing *tapasya*, the *rishi* heard an *akashvani* revealing to him that he would be born again to form the Khalsa Panth to save *Sanatan Dharma*.

There is also an older legend. The other names of Hemkund are Lokpal and Lakshman Kund. According to the local belief, Lakshman, younger brother of Shri Ram, meditated on the banks of this lake. Later he was brought here in an unconscious state after he was wounded in the war with Ravan. Urmila, his wife kept a *vrata* for the recovery and longevity of her husband. As a result of her *vrata*, Hanuman could locate Mount Dronagiri which had *sanjivani buti* growing in its jungles. Lakshman got well. *Devatas* showered the flower petals and those are flowers that grow in Uttarakhand. There is an enduring belief among the Bhotia women of Ghamsali and Niti that a visit to Lokpal would be conducive to the good health of their menfolk. The lake is, therefore, visited annually by them for bath and prayers. A visit on *Janmashtmi* the birthday of Lord Krishna, is considered very ausicious. The women of Niti make a very difficult trek over perennial glaciers and cross Bhyunder pass to reach the place. They leave their shoes at Gagaria and walk the last eight kilometres barefooted. The lake has thus been a place of pilgrimage for centuries. The entire valley is associated with the name of Lakshman who is worshipped as an incarnation of Shiva. The river flowing through the valley is called the Lakshman Ganga. The pass connecting the valleys of the Lakshman Ganga and the Amrit Ganga is called the Lakshman pass. The confluence of the Lakshman Ganga and the Vishnu Ganga is named Lakshman Prayag.

Returning to the legend and traditions about Shri Guru Gobind Singh, the shrine owes its origin to the unflinching endeavours of Bhai Sohan Singh. In 1932, Havildar Sohan Singh, who was a religious teacher in the Golden Temple at Amritsar, was fascinated with the study of the *Vichitra Natak*, the autobiography of Shri Guru Gobind Singh. In this treatise, the *Guru* has alluded to his meditation in an area associated with Raja Pandu, the father of the Pandava princes of the *Mahabharata*. Following lines are revealing:

Ab main apni katha bakhaoni,
tap sadat jih bidhi mohi aanone.
Hemkunt parbat hai jahan

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sapta shring sohat hai tahan.
Sapta shring teh nam kahava
Pandu raj jih jog kamava.
Teh hum adhik tapasya sadhi
mahakal kalika aradhi.

The Guru has told of his earlier life when he performed *tapasya* at a glacial lake surrounded by seven peaks. The place is associated with Raja Pandu. Pandukeshwar, where he got married to Kunti, is barely two kilometres ahead of Gobindghat. Sant Sohan Singh was so inspired by this account that he made up his mind to find it and build a memorial for others to visit. To fulfil his intense desire, he set out from his place and reached Pandukeshwar. He made searching enquiries from the people. It is said that after many efforts, he came across an old man who indicated the general area fitting the description of seven peaks reflecting in a glacial lake. Bhai Sohan Singh took a guide to reach Hemkund. After a difficult trek of many days with enormous hazards like an uncongenial climate, inhospitable terrain and adverse effects of altitude, he reached the lake called Lokpal. He found the place to be exactly in accordance with the descriptions in *Vichitra Natak*. It is believed that while he was continuing his search for the exact spot where the Guru sat in meditation, an old man with grey hair and eye-brows, met him and asked the purpose of his visit. On being apprised of the task, he indicated a flat piece of rock next to Hemkund. That was the place where the tenth *guru* had sat in meditation. Bhai Sohan Singh was thrilled. The ecstasy at the fulfilment of a cherished mission was too great and he was somewhat dazed. When he came to the old man was nowhere to be seen. All search was in vain. Bhai Sohan Singh returned to Amritsar and narrated his experience to Bhai Vir Singh, a famous Punjabi poet, and a member of Golden Temple Gurudwara Committee. The gripping account of Bhai Sohan Singh aroused the curiosity and interest of Bhai Vir Singh and both of them re-visited Hemkund during the same year. On their return, they duly advertised this discovery. Contributions started pouring in for raising a *gurudwara*. Bhai Vir Singh was the first to contribute Rs. 2,000.

During 1933, they visited Hemkund again with the idea of laying a foundation stone for a *gurudwara*. They brought the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* with them. The *gurudwara* was planned at the exact spot indicated by the mysterious old man.

The setting up of a *gurudwara* was, however, strongly objected to by the inhabitants of Pandukeshwar and nearby villages who did not want a Sikh shrine to supersede their ancient belief of the association of this place with Lakshman. It was argued that the Guru had taken human form to save *Sanatan Dharam* and was not different from the ancient incarnations. These lofty representative thoughts, however, do not appear to be universal.

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During my visits to Shri Hemkunt Sahib out of as much devotion for Shri Gobind Singh as Shri Lakshman, I came across misguided individuals of both sects. Whereas some local inhabitants felt the Sikhs to be intruders, the attitude of some of the *Nihang Singhs* was unduly overbearing. I cannot forget my encounter with one such gentleman at the shrine. Said he, "If you have come to visit the *Gurudwara Sahib*, wash yourself before you enter and if you have come to see the temple, that shack is that side!" And he derisively pointed towards the Lakshman temple. Needless to say, such fanatics have no place in our secular society. Both Shri Guru Gobind Singh and Lakshman have a universal appeal to Hindus as well as Sikhs. The word 'Ram' implies God in *Shri Guru Granth Sahib.*

After a lot of argument, reason prevailed and it was decided to construct a temple of Shri Lakshman side by side with the *gurudwara.* A 10′×10′ *gurudwara* was completed in 1936. Bhai Sohan Singh spent remaining 25 years of his life in the service of this shrine.

The route from Gobindghat to Hemkund passes through pretty landscape. The total distance is 21 kilometres. The track from Gobindghat to Gagaria or Gobind Dham runs along the side of the Lakshman Ganga. From Gobind Dham to Hemkund, the track runs along a small rivulet which emerges from Hemkund and is called the Hem Ganga.

Gobindghat is approximately 1,670 metres high. It has a beautiful *gurudwara* located 100 metres north from the road from Joshimath to Badrinath. This is under the management of Shri Hemkunt Sahib Management Trust, Latouches Road, Kanpur. The *gurudwara* was built during 1952-56 by the founder of the trust, Havildar Baba Mohan Singh. The shrine can accommodate 750 *yatris* at a time! Free food is served to all. Rich and poor, big and small, all sit together and eat in *guru ka langar*, which is open throughout the day during the peak season. Beddings are also provided.

Gurudwara Gobind Dham or Gagaria is nearly 13 kilometres away and serves as a halting place for a night's rest. Some of the adventurous pilgrims, however, visit Hemkunt Sahib and return to Gobind Dham on the same day. The track is mulable right up to Hemkunt Sahib. Civil ponies and porters are available at reasonable rates for taking the *yatris* or their baggage. In terms of time, it takes nearly five to seven hours for an average man to cover the distance up to Gobind Dham which is located at a height of approximately 3,400 metres.

The track from Gobindghat crosses Vishnu Ganga over a suspension bridge and enters the valley of the river Lakshman Ganga. The climb at the very outset is steep and the base hill is a poor introduction to the beauty lying ahead. After about three kilometeres the valley widens. Plodding along, we come across a number of tea shops and then reach the pretty village of Bhyunder. The routes to Hathi Parvat and Ghori Parvat emanate

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from this village. A beautiful view of Ghori Parvat, resembling a pair of horses with upright ears at the approach of the master, can be had from side hills. Bhyunder also commands a birds' eye view of the entire valley right up to Gobindghat. To the right is the massif granite mountain from which a fall of more than 250 metres descends eagerly for meeting Lakshman Ganga. A route also bifurcates from here for lake Karunakal Kagbhusandi. Lying at a distance that can be covered in two days, the banks of this lake are studded with flowers of many hues. Two huge rocks resembling a crow and an eagle in deep conversation are seen on a side hill. Lovers of nature must pay a visit to this lake.

In the days gone by, needles and thread were big treasures for the women of the area. *Yatris* invariably took some needles for exchange purposes. The memory persists and the village girls enroute only ask for needles and thread from the pilgrims.

The river cascades her way to the right till we cross over to left bank a little beyond Bhyunder. Vegetation changes from oak to pine to cedar. Flowers seem to pick up collective courage and appear in bunches here and there. It is better to halt for the night at Gagaria in the *gurudwara*, the government pilgrim rest house or forest rest house to drink deep the serene beauty and the solitude.

Gurudwara Shri Gagaria Sahib has been established by the Hemkunt Trust since 1962. The foundation stone was laid in 1962 and the building completed in 1964. At present, about five hundred pilgrims can be accommodated. *Guru-ka-langar* functions all the time. There are more volunteers than needed. It is most heartening to see some of the fashionable ladies offering to cook and clean the utensils which they might have seldom done at their homes.

For further trekking to Hemkund, it is better to start early so as to be back to Gobind Dham for evening tea. It takes five hours for an average person to reach Hemkund. One has to climb a gradient of nearly 1,555 metres in a distance of about eight kilometres. One kilometre ahead of Gobind Dham, a track bifurcates to the left for the Valley of Flowers. The uphill path is paved with stones ascending in an interminable series of steps. Looking around, we notice that we are in a wonderland of rugged peaks. Set amidst the green forest, jagged peaks and glaciers as a backdrop, it is some of the grandest scenery. There is a profusion of wild flowers wearing elaborate costumes of swirling colours. Huge chunks of ice are seen in the shady nooks and corners. The heat generated by the movement and the beads of sweat do not let you feel that you have gained altitudes and are in a colder region. Sit to rest and the evaporation caused by chilly breeze sends a shiver down the spine. Get up again, warm up and move. The process seems unending. There are altogether 58 hairpin bends in the track climb of 1,555 metres. Thus with every

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turn you have climbed an average of 28 metres or nearly a hundred feet. The climb is steep. As we gain altitude, the effect of rarefied air causes headache and nausea. The latter is also caused by inhalation of the fragrance of blue flowers locally called *mangua*. A swooning and sinking sensation overtakes the heart. The remedy is close at hand. Carry some pickles and lemons which counter act the poisonous exudations of the *mangua* flowers. Also keep some aspirin handy.

Approximately two kilometres before the shrine, there is a line of stairs ascending to the left. They are called the golden staircase and offer a short cut to Hemkunt. There are a total of 1,064 steps. Possibility of early arrival at the shrine, however, soon turns out to be a tiring and trying venture. They save time but consume a lot of energy. *Nishan Sahib*, the flag at the shrine is visible at about one kilometre from the *gurudwara* and beckons you on. Reaching at last a feeling of exhilaration comes up at the very first step at Hemkunt Sahib. There is an atmosphere of complete peace and contentment. Hemkund is a crystal clear lake of about 200 metres by 150 metres. The *kund* reflects the iridescent beauty of the peaks and glaciers. In spite of the water being freezing cold and the devotee still warm after a difficult ascent, nobody ever falls sick or catches a cold. Separate bathing arrangements have been made for men and women. After the bath, *sadh sangat*, the holy congregation, sings hymns in praise of their tenth Guru.

It is believed that either a pilgrim succeeds in his mission at the first attempt or does not make it at all. I know of people of great influence who could not reach in three attempts.

The plan to make a new *gurudwara* was made in 1964 and work started in 1968. The building is estimated to cost 40 lakhs and will be completed by 1980. It has been designed by Sir M.S. Sayali. When completed this will be the highest temple in the world.

It is said that true devotees can hear their *guru* coming on his horse to visit them. It is also believed, that pilgrims who stay the night at the Hemkunt Sahib hear the splashing of water in the lake as though some people are having a bath. However, this sound suddenly ceases if a ray of light is focussed in that direction. If any impure item is thrown in the *kund* a bird comes so swiftly as to be barely visible and removes the impurity out of the lake! Whatever it may be, silent and mute messages from the beyond beckon you on and fill the soul. You are at the feet of Lakshman and *Shri Guruji*. You are one with God.

RITHA SAHIB

The next shrine we visit is *gurudwara* Ritha Sahib associated with the third travel of Shri Guru Nanak Dev which took place from 1571 to 1574.

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According to Dr. Kahan Singh Nabha, Guru Nanak Dev set out from Kartarpur and reached Jwalamukhi via Kalanaur, Gurdaspur, Dasuya, Palampur and Kot Kangra. From there he went to the temple of Sitla-Devi in Chamba. He next came to Pinjore near Chandigarh where a *gurudwara* has been built to perpetuate the memory of his visit. From Pinjore, he set out for Uttarakhand and reached Hardwar on *Baisakhi* day. After having a dip in the holy Ganga, Guru Nanak held religious discourses with the learned pandits of Hardwar. From there, he reached Kotdwar via Kankhal, where a *gurudwara* was erected in his memory. Guru Nanak then visited Gangotri and Yamunotri. After having a round of many places and preaching true religion, Guru Nanak reached Badrinath. From there, he went to a shrine named Lokhnath via Hemkund where he met many *sadhus*. Details of the travel at this stage are lost in mystery and many believe Lokhnath to be Lokpal or Hemkund. On his return from these mountains, Guruji reached Ranikhet and Almora. At Almora, he came to know of human sacrifices at the altar of the *devi* where innocent strangers and poorer members of the society were killed. He held discussions with the Chand *raja* who agreed to put an end to the evil practice. Guru Nanak spread the light of true faith wherever he went.

In the last stage of his journey, Guru Nanak Dev reached Bagheshwar and preached his sermon of *Sat nam*. A platform (*thara*) was constructed for Guru Nanak where he sat for religious discourses. It is still in existence and is about 10 feet by 10 feet. From Bagheshwar, Guru Nanak reached Champavat. In the beginning of the sixteenth century, whole area of Champavat was the centre of the *kan-phata jogis*. The head of the sect was one Shri Dhar Nath. After meeting him, Guru Nanak reached Ritha Sahib where many *kan-phatas* were living. His disciple Mardana felt hungry and requested a *kan-phata* for food. The *jogi* refused and sarcastically asked him to get food from his *guru*. Shri Guru Nanak Dev told Mardana to take the fruit of the tree under which they were sitting. It happened to be a *ritha* tree, the fruit of which is normally very bitter. Mardana climbed and tasted. The fruit was sweet. Mardana relished the *ritha* fruit and also offered it to the *kan-phata jogis*. On seeing this miracle, the *kan-phatas* realized their mistake, bowed their heads in shame before Guru Nanak and became his disciples.

For about four hundred and fitfy years, the holy place associated with the above incident remained in the possession of the *mahants*. They used to visit various places in the country and distributed *parsad* of sweet *rithas* and in lieu accepted offerings. Many rulers of princely states in Punjab also sent the offerings. No *gurudwara* was, however, constructed by the *mahants*. They even got its name removed from the government records! It was due to persistent efforts of Shri Guru Singh Sabha, Haldwani, that devotees were allowed to have *darshan* on *Baisakh Purnima*. Shri Guru

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Singh Sabha got a small *gurudwara* of tin erected and also purchased a small piece of land costing rupees 4,000. On the occasion of the fair, devotees used to experience great hardships to find accommodation and at times stayed in cattle sheds.

In the year 1969, some devotees from Amritsar came to have *darshan*. They were appalled at the lack of any pilgrim comforts and prevailed upon the Prabhandhak Committee Nanak Mata Sahib to shoulder the responsibility of looking after the *gurudwara*. A sub-committee was exclusively formed to look after the affairs of Shri Ritha Sahib.

The Ritha Sahib committee made the arrangements for the fair in 1970. At this fair, many volunteers came forward to look after the pilgrims. To solve the accommodation problem, the committee is constructing the Guru Nanak Sarai. Eighteen rooms have already been constructed.

On the eve of fair in 1974, the foundation of the new *gurudwara* was laid. In years to come, many new facilities will be added.

DARBAR SAHIB

We next visit the shrine of the Udasi Sikhs at Dehra Dun. As we have seen in 'Pravesh' the beautiful lush green city of Dehra Dun, famous for its luscious and juicy *leechis*, owes its very name and existence to Baba Ram Rai. Baba was the elder son of Shri Guru Har Rai, the seventh *guru* of Sikhs. He was born to Mata Sulakshini at Kiratpur near Rupar in Punjab. Mata Sulakshini was, however, not the *maharani* and many in fact claim that she was not even the legally wedded wife.

Baba spent his childhood in Kiratpur and received education in *Sanskrit*, *Gurmukhi* and *Persian* from Diwan Durgamal who was a great scholar in the court of Guru Har Rai. The details of his life are contained in *Mahima Prakash*, a biography. As a child, Baba showed miraculous powers. He spent most of his time in *tapasya*. His fame spread and reached Aurangzeb. The Moghul emperor decided to test the miraculous powers of Baba Ram Rai and, therefore, summoned him to Delhi.

Guru Har Rai asked him to take *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* with him and go without fear. God would be with him. Ram Rai reached Delhi. Aurangzeb had already decided to put his powers to test. Babaji was asked to put on clothes soaked in poison before going to the court. Baba smiled and uttering God's name, wore the clothes. The poison did not act! Aurangzeb was taken aback. He had, however, not given up yet. He got a flimsy chair put on a well and got it well camouflaged. Baba sat on the chair which became firm like a rock. This went on and according to Bahi Santokh Singh, a total of 72 tests were performed. Baba came through all of them and Aurangzeb came to call him a *Kamil Fakir*. Baba was living in Chandra-

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wal Khera on the bank of Yamuna. His fame spread and a stream of devotees started coming for *darshan*.

After Guru Har Rai, his younger son, Har Kishan ascended the *gaddi* in 1661. Aurangzeb secretly supported Baba Ram Rai but had no mind to interfere openly in the affair. Har Kishan died of small pox on March 30 1664. Baba Ram Rai performed his last rites at Hardwar. His mother Mata Sulakshini and Diwan Durgamal accompanied him. Details of this visit are still available in the *bahi* of Pandit Bhawani Prasad Mishra of Hardwar. The Sikh *gaddi*, however, again eluded Baba Ram Rai. Shri Guru Teg Bahadur was enthroned. Even after the *martyrdom* of Shri Guru Teg Bahadur, Baba was not elected. He then renounced all worldly things and came to Doon valley where he established his *dera*. On instructions from Aurangzeb, the raja of Garhwal made an endowment of seven villages to Baba. The first *dera* was established at village Kandli on the banks of river Tons. It was later shifted to the village Khurbura. The shrine was built in the village Dhamuwala. Aurangzeb also contributed for its construction. Both villages slowly lost their identities to the newly emerging town of Dehra Dun.

The Garhwal *raja* was a great devotee of Baba Ram Rai and invariably obtained his blessings before launching campaigns against his enemies. Baba had a considerable following which included the princedom. It is on record that even Maharaja Ranjit Singh sent an offering of Rs. 500 to the shrine.

The death of Baba is shrouded in mystery. It is said that Baba could leave his mortal being and his soul could travel great distances to help devotees in distress. Once it so happened that a devotee was threatened by shipwreck on the high seas. He prayed to Baba for help. Babaji informed Bibi Punjab Kaur about his mission. He asked her to wait the return of his soul into the body and leaving his mortal remains, reached his devotee on the high seas. After the mission, Babaji returned to his *dera* in the form of a fly. Bibi Punjab Kaur and his followers had, however, despaired due to inordinate delay and had assigned the body to holy fire. Baba had no choice but to proceed to heaven! He, however, revisits the shrine every year in the form of a fly.

Darbar Sahib was probably built by Baba Ram Rai in 1699 A.D. It is also believed that the shrine was built by Mata Punjab Kaur and was completed on Monday, the 8th of *Asuj* in 1707 A.D. Baba's bed is preserved in the central block. He had four wives and the four corners have been assigned to them. There are three *kunds*; the largest being approximately 75 metres by 60 metres. Two of them receive water through the Rajpur Canal which was constructed by Bibi Punjab Kaur.

The religious functions at the shrine fall around *Holi* when *Mela Jhanda Sahib* lasting for 10 days is held on the birthday of Babaji. The

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gathering is well over ten thousand and the establishment provides meals to the *sangat* at *guru-ka-langar*. There is a huge flag staff at the centre of the temple. The standard is changed every year on *Mela Jhanda Sahib* falling on the fifth day after *Holi*. The second fair is held on 8th of *Bhadon*, the birthday of Lord Krishna. Devotees collect outside the town on Chakrata road. Udasi Sikhs wear red turbans and it is a veritable red sea advancing to the shrine. They are received outside the town by the *mahant*. A pocession is formed which proceeds to the shrine, chanting hymns to the glories of God and singing eulogies of Baba Ram Rai.

The holy work of affixing marble chips on Shri Darbar Sahib was undertaken by Mahant Lakshman Das. The work is being completed by the present Mahant Indresh Charan Das.

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20

Rock Gardens of Uttarakhand

SABRI BHILNI collected berries for offering to Shri Ram during his *banavas*. When Ram and Lakshman came to see her, she kept tasting the berries and gave only sweet ones to them. Ram graciously accepted. Lakshman did not like to take half-eaten berries and refused. Such was her love that where ever she threw the berries, *sanjivani buti* took root. Time went on. There was a war between Ram and Ravana. Grievously wounded in the war, Lakshman became unconscious and was moved to Uttarakhand. He was brought to the bank of lake Lokpal. Many remedies were tried but to no avail. Urmila, his wife kept a *vrata* for his well-being. Hanuman went round Uttarakhand in search of *sanjivani buti*. As time passed and Lakshman was still in coma, Urmila's condition also became more and more precarious. Hanuman visited far-flung areas; Hanuman Chatti in the valley of the Yamuna, Hanuman Tibba near Gangotri, the Hanuman peak in the Rishi Ganga gorge, and at last reached Hanuman Chatti at the confluence of the Vishnu Ganga and the Kashi Ganga near Badrinath. Here he came to know that *sanjivani buti* was available in Dronagiri. He rushed across Kunt Khal pass and reached the place. He was, however, unable to identify the life-saving herb and was in a predicament. The condition of Lakshman as well as Urmila was such that no time could be lost. Hanuman decided to take the whole hill-side to save Lakshman and Urmila. *Sanjivani buti* was at last administered to Lakshman. He regained consciousness. Urmila broke her fast. It was a victory of the *bhilni's* love since *sanjivani buti* owed its very existence to that love. It was also the defeat of Lakshman's pride; an example of Hanuman's devotion to duty and a victory for *sati* Urmila. All the royal family and the *rishis* were happy at the revival of Lakshman and greatly praised Hanuman. *Devatas* did *pushpa varsha*. Those are the flowers that grow all over Uttarakhand.

This is a leaf from *Ramayana* as viewed in the remote valley of river Dhauli Ganga. The Temple of Shri Lakshman stands at the exact spot near Hemkund where he regained consciousness (See: The Sikh Shrines). The valley where most of the flowers fell is called Nandan Kanan.

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Similar legends of flowers are common all over the world. According to a Persian tale of Shirin and Farhad, Khusro married Shirin forcibly. Jilted in love, Farhad pierced his heart with a dagger. Wherever the drops of his blood fell, a magnificent tulip is said to have bloomed!

Nandan Kanan or the Valley of Flowers was thus always known to Tolchha Bhotias. However, as is well known, it was the famous mountaineer Frank S. Smythe who first named it so in 1931. Contrary to common belief, he was not the first European to have discovered the beauty of this region. It was another Smythe, Colonel Edmund Smythe who explored many byways of Uttarakhand in 1850s and 60s. Edmund Smythe was an education officer in the army and came to India as a major. It was he who selected the famous Milamwal brothers, popularly known as Pandits, who surveyed Tibet and Mongolia. He crossed the Lakshman pass or Bhyunder pass in 1862. He was all praise for the floral beauty of the region. His views were heard far and wide. Attracted by the accounts of Edmund Smythe, the second notable Englishman to cross the pass was Dr. Tom Longstaff who called it the Smyth's pass. Dr. Longstaff was a mountaineer of world renown and climbed many a peak all over the world. In Garhwal, he was the first to climb the Trishul in 1907. In his book, *This My Voyage*, he has this to say about Nandan Kanan:

> Beyond these glaciers we looked down into
> a valley of the richest green balm to the eyes
> after the stony desolation we had left
> behind. We reached it on July 13th to
> find the most luxuriant meadows we had
> met with in this part of the Himalaya.
> We waded through flowers up to our waists,
> ferns, yellow lilies and anemones, green
> fritillaries, purple monks-hood, blue
> dwarf iris, masses of forget-me-nots with
> yellow king cups by the streams. Innumerable
> butterflies of alpine forms, including at
> least two species of large swallow-tails,
> with many singing birds, were about us
> on all sides. We found a plot of grassy
> sward for tents, all unspoiled by
> sheep for, as our Garhwalis said, no
> flocks could be pastured there because of
> *dungri bhik*, an aconite which is poison
> to them. The charms of the place were so
> irresistible that we spent a whole day
> there.*

**This My Voyage*, p. *111*

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It was, however, Mr. Frank Smythe, the hero of Kamet who first called this region the Valley of Flowers. He first visited the area along with other members of the Kamet Expedition in 1931 after the successful ascent of Kamet.

He later came back in 1936 to explore the floral beauty of Nandan Kanan and collected more than three hundred varieties of seeds and pods. All his exploits are beautifully described in his book the *Valley of Flowers.* So interesting was his account of this area of pristine charm that the Botanical Garden of Edinburgh sent Miss Joan Margaret Legge in 1939 for collecting seeds of some of the varieties. She had a fatal fall from a rock and died in the valley on July 4, 1939. She was cremated by the people of Bhyunder. Her sister got her grave constructed at the exact spot of her death and put a slab reading:

IN LOVING MEMORY
OF
JOAN MARGARET LEGGE
FEB 21ST 1885
JULY 4TH 1939
'I WILL LIFT UP MINE EYES UNTO THE HILLS
FROM WHENCE COMETH MY HELP'

There are three entrances to the valley; one via Gobindghat—Gagaria which is the easiest and taken by the general tourist: one via Kunt Khal, a pass above Hanuman Chatti taken by Hanuman during his quest for *sanjivani buti*, and one from Niti through the valley of river Amrit Ganga across the Lakshman pass. I prefer to call the last one 'The Ladies' Route' even though it is real tough-going. What devotion to the men-folk! In addition to the ones mentioned above, one can also reach the valley from Mana through a nullah between Mana gorge and Ghastoli. This is only a shade easier than the Lakshman pass approach. The grave of Miss Joan lies a little ahead of the main entrance to the valley, *viz* Gobindghat, Bhyunder and Gagaria.

The Nandan Kanan is filled with snow and seasonal glaciers from November to end of May. By mid-June, the main glaciers clear off leaving huge chunks of ice here and there. The flowers start blooming as soon as the thaw sets in. Splashes of colour are noticeable from middle of June and the peak reached between the second weak of July to the second week of August. In the higher regions where the snow melts later, some varieties remain in bloom till about the middle of September. The women of Niti visit the place on *Janmashtmi* falling in the last weak of August when the valley is at its height of beauty in the higher regions and just past its prime in the lower altitudes. Unfortunately, the peak period is the time of intense rains in the plains and Sub-Himalayas. The system of communications is badly disrupted. Generally, visitors come to the valley after the rains and are normally disappointed. The government of Uttar Pradesh has put a

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board near the entrance from Gagaria side, reading 'VALLEY OF FLOWERS.' Many visitors just reach that spot and hope to see all the flowers there. They fail to realize that Nandan Kanan is *a valley* and not *a point*. In case they proceed towards the snout of the Lakshman Ganga glacier, they can come across beautiful potentillas, primulas, marigold, balsam, phlox and hollyhocks right up to middle of September. By the end of September, nature is back in its autumn attire of light gold of the ripened and withered vegetation.

The route for Hemkund and Nandan Kanan is common up to Gagaria. The valley is about three kilometres from *Gurudwara* Gagaria and takes one hour. The route up to Gagaria has already been described in the chapter on the Sikh Shrines. The first place we reach is Joshimath. This may be reached through a number of ways (i) Rishikesh, Dev Prayag, Rudra Prayag, Karna Prayag, Joshimath; (ii) Rishikesh, Narindra Nagar, Tehri, Kirtinagar, Sirinagar, Joshimath; (iii) Kotdwara, Lansdowne, Pauri, Sirinagar, Joshimath; (iv) Almora, Baijnath, Gwaldam, Narayan Bagar, Karna Prayag, Joshimath; (v) Ranikhet, Dwarahat, Simli, Karna Prayag, Joshimath and (vi) Pithoragarh, Ogla, Didihat, Thal, Chaukori, Bagheshwar, Gwaldam, Karna Prayag, Joshimath. There are a number of tracks for the trekkers and where there is a will, a number of ways suiting individual whims and fancies can always be found. The shortest cut to the valley is via Rishikesh, Dev Prayag, Joshimath, onwards. The visitors who are keen on viewing the rugged grandeur of the Zaskar Mountains in which Nandan Kanan lies, may visit Niti and approach through the Lakshman pass or go to Hanuman Chatti and come via Kunt Khal pass. From any side, the routes pass through some of the most picturesque spots. The valley is about three days march from both Ghamsali and Hanuman Chatti. One thing that must be remembered, however, is that Nandan Kanan is a valley and not a point. If you do not find flowers at one place, a visit to the mountains on your left and right may be rewarding. Here and there, you find ravines filled with brightly coloured flowers. Nature seems to be playing *holi*. One would discover some of the most romantic patterns. I once came across a patch of velvet touch grass near Kunt Khal with flower plants imparting the touch of a pattern on a carpet! Only mother nature can spread such carpets!

Nandan Kanan is the famed land of *Sapta Shring*, the seven peaks where Guru Gobind Singh did *tapasya*. They are Hathi Parvat resembling a white elephant, Ghori Parvat looking like a pair of horses with upturned ears, Mount Call Bell resembling its namesake, Rataban with a dome, Nilgiri and some unnamed peaks of striking beauty. Lakshman Ganga passes through the middle and is joined by many small tributaries descending from *Sapta Shring*. The byways offered by these streams invariably reveal areas of untold floral charm and beauty. There is a small pond called Nag Tal

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in the valley. A blue flower, looking like the snapdragon, and locally called *manguwa*, grows near Nag Tal and exudes poisonous odour which makes men feel giddy. Hence the name.

In Nandan Kanan, I have noticed flowers right up to Lakshman pass which is more than 16,700 feet. The flowers, however, exist much higher and extend almost up to 18,000 feet. The varieties of the flowers which bloom in June in the lower regions, may be seen higher up in August-September for the climatic conditions are generally the same. Snow in the higher regions melts later and while the lower areas have already become too hot, the higher alps are just fine for the plants. Selection of the correct time is the key to a successful visit. At the peak period, colours of the dawn, the rainbow and the setting sun are all mingled here in an unmatched beauty.

Nandan Kanan lies beyond the intense rain belt and though thunder roars and lightning flashes, the rains are comparatively less. All the same, the area gets enough water supply and gets almost flooded by the melting snows. In early June, some flowers have already blossomed at places while the snow holds on to some others from which numerous streams flow. These water channels are fully formed only by late afternoons and glisten in the fading light, offering a spectacle which is beyond words. This is the untamed Himalayan scenery with magnificent primeval beauty. At times the entire spectacle gets softened by the fleecy clouds floating over and nestling in the higher valleys. The blinding glare of the snow is smothered. This is the time for birds to join in the exquisite orchestra of nature. Bushes are rustling and alive with the newly arrived birds chirping and dancing from twig to twig. No composer has ever captured even a fraction of the melodies heard in this remote region.

The entire scene is repeated every year and slowly moves upwards. As glaciers recede and the snow becomes patchy, the earth gets soaked with water. As the ground dries, it erupts in a starting explosion of colour from millions of flowers bursting into blossoms. The scene slowly glides upwards and fades in the higher regions. This sort of a spectacle cannot be enjoyed by casual visitors who have gone there for a day or two. Many people reach there too late and then expect to see everything near the board VALLEY OF FLOWERS. That cannot be. Nature cannot be made to order for anyone.

Nights in the valley have a different charm. Stars appear studded in a huge blue sheet. In the distance, an avalanche roars down the slopes and the night explodes with crashing and crackling sounds. With the snow-clad mountains all around, enough light is always reflected. Visibility is comparatively high. Millions of blossoms, scattered across a lush green meadow, assume myriad shapes of animals and men at rest. The patches ablaze with the red potentillas suddenly get transformed into pools of blood. A chill passes the spine. An avalanche in the distant hills sets huge

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masses of rock in motion. As these come rushing down, stones collide with moraine, producing sparkles through friction. The moving river of sparklets viewed against a vast white snow-field seems something out of this world. You almost feel the presence of the gods and demons.

The very next day you notice that plants in the lower areas have faded out and some new ones have come up a little higher. This is the elusive beauty of the flowers. Not only do you have to be at the correct time, but also the correct place to witness the elaborately coloured fields. Spring in Nandan Kanan is never half-hearted. The valley is literally flooded with flowers. You have to yourself locate the high tide!

Those visiting the valley and wanting to drink deep the beauty of the landscape should encamp on the banks of the Lakshman Ganga and then fan out on either side on the subsequent days. There are fine camping sites available all around. Sometimes discarded huts of the herb collectors can serve the purpose. Those blessed with a more adventurous spirit should move right up to Bhyunder pass. It is a difficult pass surrounded by high-peaks and flanked to perennial glaciers but affords one of the finest views in the whole of Uttarakhand. The pass is completely barren but a descent of a few kilometres on either side transports you to a land of tremendous floral beauty, hundreds of metres of charming primuals, potentiallas, geraniums, forget-me-nots, anemones, irises, blue poppies and a profusion of dwarf rhododendrons. You are beyond the region of monsoons surrounded by wide new horizons. Immediately, near the pass are fields covered with snow, followed by russet cliffs and then the profusion of flowers strikes us in full force. The floral beauty will quicken the pulse of any naturalist or lover of seclusion and beauty.

This, however, is not the only valley where flowers grow in Uttarakhand. Remember the legend narrated somewhere back about gods showering flowers in Uttarakhand. You encounter these expressions of godly joy in remote valleys and ledges of this Valley of Gods. Many times, ascending or decending the hills you are afforded the most delicious experience of walking over beautiful pastures decorated by a tender profusion of flowers, primulas, candituifts, androsaces, phlox, anemone with white and blue blossoms, calenduals, balsam, potentillas, asters, petonias, sedums, blue poppies, glades of marigolds, irises on the nullah banks, delphiniums, scented jasmine, white and yellow dwarf chrysanthemums, yellow dandelion, clusters of tulips, wild rose of various hues, yellow nomocharis, a profusion of wild cosmos, geraniums, lilly of the valley, dianthus, myriads of daisies, a great variety of shrubs, honeysuckle with pink and yellow flowers nasturtium with bright yellow and red flower, sweet peas, saxifragas, purple and white columbine, blue corydalis, forget-me-nots and what nots!

During my extensive travels, I found many areas that have impressed me as a botanists' paradise. To the extreme left is the secluded charm of

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the valley of Chorgad. To me the valley of Jadh Ganga will ever remain as a valley of sweet peas. Near Palamsumda, there is a bed of about 400 metres of grass with numerous yellow sweet peas. The area between Chir Bas and Bhuj Bas, enroute Gaumukh called *Pushpa Bas*, or the dwelling place of the flowers by the local people. Nature employs some of her choicest hues to colour this valley. Harsil and Sukhi are rich in sunflower, cosmos and calendula. Across the Kalindi Khal pass, the valley of Arwa Nullah is an area of tremendous profusion of wild flowers. The routes from Bhatwari to Triyugi Narayan and Gauri Kund to Kedarnath are also called *Pushpa Bas*. To quote Oakley, who has this to say about Kedarnath:

> At the pilgrim's feet edging the beds of snow which the pilgrim has to traverse at intervals, grow a profusion of pale rose coloured auriculas and yellow primroses of delicious fragrance . . . As he mounts the steep, the woods become thin and scanty, but their place is taken by roses and syringa bushes of powerful scent. So strong is the fragrance of the flowers near the border of eternal snow that travellers have some times been overpowered by it.*

Valleys of the rivers Nandakini, Saryu, Pindari and Ram Ganga Eastern are also rich in flowers but the Gori Ganga is peerless in this regard. Some of the most colourful dahlias grow between Mansiari and Lilam. The area between Bagh Udiyar and Marotli is a valley of flowers in its own rights. Darma and Vyas will ever remain in my mind as areas of matchless dianthus and cosmos for these flowers grow there in wild abundance. The Scottish Himalayan Expedition passed through the gorge of the Girthi Ganga from Malari to Topi Dunga. The expeditionists have recorded:

> We picked our way along rock-walls lying at angles gentle in relation to the lower precipice, and bedecked with countless flowering shrubs and plants. Most prominent among them were a yellow sweet pea, purple stone-crop, purple thistle identical to the Scottish variety and a thistle (*Morina longifolia*) bearing yellow flowers shaped like tiny honey-suckle.†

During their visit to Ralam Dhura, they saw another area of floral charm:

> This hill side was again deep in flowers. Here for the first time we saw the blue

**Holy Himalaya*, p. 142,
†*Scottish Himalaya Expedition*, p. 197.

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Himalayan poppy. We saw two. It is the
most beautiful flower we have ever seen;
extraordinarily delicate in petal, its
shade blue as Tibetan skies, its centre
large and yellow like the moon from Uja
Trichhe, made brilliant by an inner eye
of black.*

Most of the lakes of Uttarakhand are bedecked with riots of wild colours. Some of the richest in this are the Satyapha lake above Badrinath, Karnakul Kaghbusandi in the Bhyunder valley, Vasuki Tal 1 near Vasuki Parvat and Vasuki Tal 2 near Kedarnath. I have, in fact, seen flowers right up to 18,000 feet. Hence I agree with Professor S.C. Bose when he writes about the Bhyunder valley.

Perhaps to call it the valley of
flowers is an exaggeration, as flowers
are found in high meadows everywhere
in the Himalaya at elevations of between
three and four thousand metres.†

And of the wild flowers, one can always end the topic with a poem from the Punjabi poet, Mohan Singh 'Mahir'

'June bande di changi hosi
Ai par main pachhtanda
Changa hunda je rab mainun
Jangli phul bananda,
Dur durede papan kolon,
Kise juh de khunje
Chup chupeeta ugda phulda,
Hasda, te mar Janda,'

(From *Savay Pattar*)

And here is a poor translation of the above, as poor as any description of the Nature's Own Rock Gardens of Uttarakhand can be!

'Man might be the supreme being
But I repent,
Better was it that Eternal Power,
Had fashioned me as a wild flower,
Far away from worldly sins,
Near a gushing stream,
I would have blossomed,
And withered unnoticed,
To become one with eternity.'

**Ibid* p. 229.
†*Geography of the Himalaya*, p. 146

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The Byways of the Valley

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21

Jadh Ganga

The Route to Freedom

IN OUR study of the byways the valley of Jadh Ganga gets priority for more than one reason: it is the westernmost, it is the meeting ground of Shiva and Buddha and it witnessed some of the most daring escapes by prisoners during the Second World War. That is one reason why I prefer to call it The Route to Freedom. Harrer of the *Seven Years in Tibet* fame and one of the invitees of Dev Anand on the premier of his film *Ishq, Ishq, Ishq*, a bit of which was shot at high altitude, crossed over from Tsang chok la. The other pair, Hanskoop and Edmund Kramer, some of whose exploits have been recounted during our visit to Yamunotri, had a very eventful stay in the valley. Getting rid of the attentions of their tormentors at Uttarkashy, they came to Harsil. Two policemen stopped them. By the use of brain as well as brawn, they managed to subdue the policemen and entered the valley of Jadh Ganga during the thick of winter. They were ill-equipped to combat the cold and snow. Their woollens had been reduced to ashes above Yamunotri. Starvation was a relatively minor problem. They had to live on apricot seeds searched out of yak dung. They came face to face with death many times. However, they resolutely pursued liberty and attained it.

Another distinction of the valley is that it is the meeting place of Buddha with Shiva. We shall learn more about it as we proceed. There are also other natural embellishments of the valley of Jadh Ganga. It has vast meadows in the side valleys—meadows that abound in yellow sweet peas.

The entrance to the valley is through Lanka, the confluence of the Jadh Ganga and the Bhagirathi. Both rivers have cut terrific gorges separating the off-shoots of the Bandar Poonchh massif on one side and the Kailash-Matri peaks on the other. The gorge cut by Jadh Ganga through sheer rock is more than 500 metres deep.

The valley is approached by road or track on the left or right bank of the Jadh Ganga respectively. One may cross the bridge on Jadh Ganga

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and take the new road. The old track is still on the right bank and bears a testimony to the ingenuity of man. It is obvious from a single look at the angle of the cliff at one place that no track could ever be cut through it without the use of explosives. Jadh Bhotias, therefore, bored holes in the rock, and with the help of a wooden superstructure constructed a continuous sliding staircase; an engineering feat of no mean magnitude. This staircase clinging to the side of the cliff is 540 feet long and consists of 240 steps. In the local dialect, it is popularly called the Gartang gallery.

Many ups and downs and beautiful scenery in the generally enclosed valley take us to the camping ground of Karchha. Moving along the route, we get glimpses of the three snow-covered peaks rising above the left bank of the river. People call them Shiva, Parvati and Nandi. We enter a broad valley near Dhumku-Nelang. The total distance of about 35 kilometres up to Nelang can be covered in one day with determination and a steady pace. The tree-line is left at Dhumku. Some of the finest *bhojpatra* trees grow between Lanka and Dhumku. From Dhumku, a track leads us into the beautiful uninhabited valley of Chor Gad which is rich in flora and fauna. The influence of Tibetan form of *tantrik* Buddhism is strongest in Jadh valley. From a great distance, you can notice the prayer flags fluttering. A classic devotion to Shiva is also noticeable by worship of his symbols. Outside the *gompas* of Shakya Muni, a Shiva *linga* can also be seen. At Nelang, people bow to the peaks where Shiva, Parvati and Nandi reside. At the same time, just outside Nelang, the use of flowing water has been made to revolve the prayer wheel. This is an ideal example of 'live and let live'. How one wishes that all religions of the world are merged to form one. Flags called *tharchens* are nailed high up on poles to keep ghosts away. The most dreaded variety of them here is *Rolong*, the ghost of a person killed by lightning. This variety is an immigrant from Ladakh and western Tibet. In a way, we are quite near Ladakh. The Leh station of A.I.R. sends messages stronger than any other. Even the Simla station sounds just around the corner. So near, yet so far.

Beyond Nelang, a partly deserted village, we suddenly enter an arid zone. The character of the valley changes from a lush green landscape to a bleak region of sand and rock spirals.

There are mainly three rivers in the valley ; the Jahnavi, the Jadhun Gad and the Mana Gad. The Jahnavi comes from the Zaskar Ranges near Thagla pass. The Mana Gad descends from Mana pass, which, however, is approachable only through Saraswati. The Jadhun Gad comes from Dhauladhar. From the valley of Jadhun, some graziers cross over into the valley of Hop Gad in Himachal and vice-versa. All the rivers join at Naga and the combined stream is called the Jadh Ganga or Jahnavi Ganga. Moving along any of these rivers, we come across lush green

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patches of grass—some small and isolated, whilst others extending over long stretches. The beauty of the velvety grass is enhanced by myriad blossoms of yellow sweet peas. Just a little above these lush meadows are some of the stoniest areas where seasonal glaciers and avalanches have ground the rocks into gravel. Only nature can work out such contrast.

There are a number of camping sites which once saw seasonal trade boom but are now generally deserted. One can still pitch tents or take shelter in the deserted *sanghars*. The main sites are Sonam, Tirpani and Palamsumda.

From Sonam we enter an area of stark grandeur of sheer rock-faces and harsh rugged outlines. The entire area has a bold and craggy appearance with a chaos of broken fragments. One could hardly imagine that some nooks and corners would be overgrowing with flowers. The hill sides consist of conglomerates. At two places, the track has been cut through conglomerates forming natural gates. This again tells the story of rising of the Himalayas. Near Thagla, some ammonite fossils are also encountered but usually one has to dig for them.

The valley serves as a favourite escape of wild life of higher regions. The wild yak is occasionally seen in the upper regions of Mana Gad. There are great many colonies of hares living in the stony wastes. The brown bear is found in large numbers. The *barhal* is in plenty.

It is a difficult area to negotiate. The absence of trees accentuates the effects of altitude. No hazard is, however, big enough for the attainment of liberty which is one of the faundamental rights of all men. That seems to be the peculiar message of the valley of Jadh Ganga.

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22

Himal Parikrama

Gaumukh to Badrinath

OUR NEXT journey takes us from Gangotri to Badrinath over the mountains across Kalindi Khal pass of 19,510 feet. Most of the time we would be walking over the snow in sub-zero temperatures, on glaciers and moraine at heights of 12,000 to 19,000 feet. It is, therefore, essential to know a little about glaciers, avalanches, the effects of high altitude and extreme cold. We shall leave all human contacts at Bhuj Bas and then re-establish them only at Ghastoli after five or six days. We shall have to carry our own rations, bedding and first-aid kits. We must go prepared.

A glacier is a slow-moving mass of ice formed by accumulated snow in mountain valleys. It is popularly called a 'river of ice'. Snow falls on the summits and heights. Some of it melts and some evaporates, the rest accumulates. By persistent accumulation, pressure at lower layers goes on increasing which transforms snow into ice ; the lowest layers becoming almost rock like. As the pressure increases, the temperature in the lower parts rises and ice starts melting. A viscous semi-solid is formed. The hold of rocks loosens on account of this. Due to the pull of gravity and internal pressures, movement sets in. This movement in the lower parts creates ripples in the upper layers. It takes approximately 10 years for a snow-fall to get transformed into this state of movement. Tunnelling into a glacier, one could notice the snow and ice in different stages of glacial formation.

As the glacier pulsates forward, rocks slide from the surrounding hills and get accumulated on its top. Even vegetation starts taking roots and all traces of snow and ice get obliterated. Thus you can be walking on tons of ice without knowing. There is one basic difference between a river and a glacier. Water bypasses the bigger rocks and slowly shifts the smaller ones. Ice takes everything in its stride. Slowly but steadily, it bulldozes everything over, right up to the very snout where it belches out the digested rock matter.

In addition to perennial glaciers, yearly transitional glaciers are also

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formed during winters at comparatively lower heights. As they slide, they grind the rocks into sand and gravel and dig up the earth below to carry fertilizing salts into streams and rivers. It is this action that has created vast deserts of gravel on lower peaks between the tree-line and perennial snow.

The rate of movement in a glacier is different in different layers, the maximum being in the centre. This causes cracks and crevasses some of which are very deep. They get covered after a fresh snow-fall. Walking on a glacier after fresh snow is, therefore, dangerous. Men should rope up and move. A yak is an excellent guide on fresh snow. The beast can sniff the crevasses and instinctively avoids them. Wayfarers of the ice world still employ the ingenuity of this guide by making it lead the way.

The average rate of movement of a glacier is normally just 0.25 metres a day! It is quite safe to pitch tents on the glacier for a day or two. You can hear the glacier move underneath with strange crackling noises and bursts of mysterious sounds. At this rate, the glacier would move approximately 91 metres in one year or take 11 years to move one kilometre. It takes about 10 years for the snow to reach the bottom level where it changes into ice and starts moving as a glacier. A 10 kilometre long glacier would, therefore, mean that the ice at the snout has covered a span of 110 plus 10 that is 120 years. Thus moving on a glacier, we are actually moving on the snows that have witnessed different historical events. If only for this reason, a walk on a glacier is worth undertaking.

Glaciers have their own valleys. As the river level is known by the water marks on its sides, so is the glacial level recorded by parallel scratches on the rocks and hill-sides. Inevitably, the hill-sides crumble and crash onto the glacier. These rocks, rubble and debris are called lateral moraine. The tributary glaciers transport their lateral moraines right to the centre of the main glacier. This moraine in the centre is technically called medial moraine. Thus a glacier offers a beautiful spectacle of a vast ice field only in its higher reaches near the source. As it moves down, it gets clogged with moraine and offers a shaggy and decayed look. It is dirtiest near the snout and the longer the glacier, dirtier the snout. The moraine near the snout is called the terminal moraine. It is here that the glacier lets out the secrets of its age. All that is hidden in its womb is cast out—matter that has been churned in the depth of the monster for decades and centuries.

Glaciers have their own tributaries. In the case of rivers, some of the tributaries cascade down with great speed and noise to unload their share of water into the main stream. In the case of rivers of ice, such tributaries are called hanging glaciers. In their case, huge chunks of ice and moraine keep rolling down with tremendous crackling sounds. Sometimes the moraine striking against stones produces sparkles. From a distance, specially at night, you see a unique spectacle of moving and sliding fireworks. The phenomenon accompanied by echoing and re-echoing of sinister

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booming sounds and thunders of falling ice causes one to shiver. We shall witness all this as we proceed.

For our proposed journey, our first base should be at Gaumukh under the shadow of the majestic Mount Shivalinga. This mountain of immensity and solitary splendour, even though surrounded by higher peaks, will keep us company for the first few days. Rising in an immense pyramid, the Shivalinga possesses not the great dimensions but the stark simplicity of greatness. Its angles of ascent are such that it will ever remain unconquered.

Gaumukh is at an altitude of 12,770 feet. It is a fairly high altitude with rarefied air and consequent insufficiency of oxygen. Before going on, it is therefore, necessary to know some of the ill-effects of altitude, the glare of snow and intense cold. The first malady caused by altitude is 'mountain sickness'. Symptoms of this effect are characterized by headache, bleeding from nose and ears, and insomnia. Our cells and normal functions of the body get adversely affected by the lack of oxygen. The vision gets impaired. Bad appetite, lassitude and fatigue follow. Heart palpitations occur. Melencholia and strikingly high spirits with a sense of bravado may be noticed in some. Many men are, however, immune to mountain sickness, and do not feel anything beyond a shortness of breath which in any case is inevitable. The main cause of mountain sickness is reduction in atmospheric pressure and consequent supply of oxygen. The heart has to pump faster to retain adequate supply of the blood. A rise in pulse rate is, therefore, noticed. This should become almost normal with rest. If it does not, more rest may be advisable. A persistent sufferer will have to move to lower areas and try again.

Before embarking on our trek, it is equally important to take preventive measures against snow blindness. Pure snow reflects glare of the sun with a vengeance. The first thing you may be reminded of is a naughty child back home with a mirror trying to focus the sun on your face. But there you can turn your face away or move to an angle where reflection may not be a geometric possibility. There is no getting away from snow glare in higher altitudes. It pervades the whole atmosphere. The first effect is that strain on optic nerves puts the vision out of focus. A profuse discharge from the eyes follows and the eye-balls ache severely. Close the eyes and warm discharge becomes unbearable. Open them and a shooting pain seems to pierce through the entire dimensions of head. Light seems to deliver severe blows to the eyes. You are abysmally helpless and feel foolish to have let this happen to you. Paradoxically, pitch dark is your only ray of hope and even a ray of light eliminates hopes of early recovery. This state is called photo-phobia. Nothing is more soothing than complete darkness. Fortunately, a couple of days of complete rest cures this blindness fully. A few drops of castor oil put every hour also aid recovery. Snow-blindness is an ever-present danger and in nothing else is prevention better and simpler than

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cure. Use snow goggles, a coloured veil, a veil of pine needles, or just draw wool over your eyes as Bhotias do. Personal experience tells me that even cloudy dull light reflected by snow can cause snow-blindness. I got blinded by cloudy dull light near Lakshman pass. It was a nightmarish experience.

We start *Himal Parikrama* at Gaumukh. We should reach there by afternoon and bivouac. A sunset at Gaumukh is one of the finest experiences. The sun drops into a red haze and night starts stealing into the vast land of moraine and hardened ice. From the red tainted horizon, chughs, the jet black birds with red beaks and claws descend for their night's rest. Silhouetted against snow, they offer a sight of great repose. This beautiful bird, variously called the Tibetan pigeon or crow, will keep us company all along our trek. I have seen numbers of them chattering near Chushul in Ladakh, Palamsumda, and all along higher and bleaker zones. The rays of the fading sun on Bhagirathi Sisters offer a unique spectacle. Evening seems to linger quite perceptibly. Settle for the night and have a good rest for morrow will bring its own toil. The white silence is pierced only by the roar of the Bhagirathi and breaking ice. In due course of time, this roar will lose its identity in the sea. Only silence will go on for 'Speech is of Time, Silence is of Eternity.'

The morning seems to be premature as much as the evening lingered. Light seems to steal in from all sides. The sun then leaps into the golden sky and its rays spread all their gold on to the peaks. The Bhagirathi Sisters with their lower parts shaded by the Mana massif and faces lit by morning rays look the very embodiments of feminine beauty. Soon the light turns into a glare, almost an affront to the eyes. Time to put on sun glasses or just draw wool over the eyes.

It is good to start the day early. For our onward trek, we should move clinging to the hill on our left. It is very difficult to move on moraine matter. Sometimes, stones slide and move aside to gain stability. Make sure you do not fall or get a leg caught in between two boulders. After a hard climb up and down the boulders, we reach the Raktavarna glacier meaning the 'blood-thirsty glacier.' If you look in the far distance to the right, you can notice Chaukhamba across which lie *Sawargarohini* and Badrinath. The Pandavas came this way. It is along Raktavarna that they climbed on to Shri Kailash. Since they perished on this glacier, it got the name of Raktavarna.

We are now walking on age-hardened ice. The total length of Raktavarna glacier is 13 kilometres. Hence if we take .25 metres to be the mean speed of this 'river of ice', the ice we now tread on is 152 years old. This takes us to about 1824. Bahadur Shah Zafar was ruling at Delhi. Strifes perpetrated by East India Company were at a peak. Seeds of the First War of Independence were being sown. At the same scale, Gangotri glacier covers a span of 353 years. Thus the snow that fell in 1623 A.D. has

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reached Gaumukh in 1976. The glacier has, therefore, witnessed all events of the Indian history from the reign of Jehangir to date.

Here and there, through crevasses and crannies, you can see a river flowing down below. It enters Bhagirathi somewhere under the ice and joins it even before it emerges at Gaumukh. This is the very first confluence. The local name of this subterranean river is Kali Ganga for she is the one that devoured the Pandavas. We keep moving on moraine matter and at last reach a ridge beyond which lies another diagonal depression. That is Chaturangi (Chatur-Rangi) glacier, meaning the four-coloured glacier. One glimpse on the form of the monster would reveal the appropriateness of this name given by our ancestors. It has multi-coloured ice blocks. We have to move on or along this glacier and will become familiar with its charms and beauties. We have been moving all along on moraine. Here and there some grassy patches offer a fine contrast. Do not be misled. These patches are holding on to the top layers of ice hardened with age. The rate of advance of this river of ice is so slow that dust brought by crumbling hill sides, atmosphere and shifting and drifting moraine permits accumulation of layers of earth. Birds and strong winds bring seeds and grass takes root. In season, many flowers blossom.

As we move on the view around has picked up in variety and majesty. Kedarnath Dome has revealed its full beauty. Shivalinga, Karchha Kund, Chaukhamba, Bhagirathi Sisters, Bharat Kunte, Bhrigu Panth and numerous other peaks are out to show their forms and charms. We are in the amphitheatre of Himavat.

Crossing the ridge between Raktavarna and Chaturangi, we descend on to the glacier and move on. It is about one kilometre wide here. We move up and down among mounds and depressions, stone heaps and bare glaring faces of ice. It can be very tiring. We notice a sapphire-coloured lake studded in the rubble to our left. This is Devtal. Local belief is that *devatas* come to have a bath here. Sapphire-blue waters glitter in the sunlight. Multi-coloured ice and boulders of Chaturangi surround the lake on all sides. There would be more of these lakes as we proceed. Looking back through the valley of Bhagirathi, we see the mountains rising tier upon tier; long immense spurs covered with jungles going right up to the snows. Tucked up at the very feet of Shrikantha peak in the distance is a meadow of lush green colour. Trees and bushes seem to hold on to ledges, precipitious cliffs and crags. A fairly vast plain called Tapoban can be seen at the feet of Shivalinga. Scenery has sublimity and savage grandeur.

From Chaturangi, we start climbing the ridge on the left bank. Rarefied air is already making you pant harder and harder. The pulse rate has shot up to 120 and more. The sky has magic clearness peculiar to rarefied air. A number of side glacier valleys stretch down from surrounding mountains. At last we reach Nandanban, a vast grassy field stretching along the left

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bank of Chaturangi. There are numerous water channels criss-crossing the field. We have walked barely seven kilometres but it is time to call it a day. A beauty spot Nandanban is. The afternoon mists are already gathering. Soon it will rain. It rains every day on these glaciers and then snow starts falling. There is a belief among the people that the day it does not rain and snow here, will be the Dooms Day. You sense around you the divine and awesome presence of the Omnipresent and the Omnipotent. That is the biggest gift of these mountains. The mind dwells on Him. Cold and clammy vapours are already covering the mounds on glaciers. It has started drizzling. Even snow has started falling mildly. It is good that we pitched bivouac in time. The sky is already clearing. Soon the gold and crimson sunset will offer a glorious sight.

The nights descend with full force. It is all calm. The stars look like myriad pearls studded in the sky. This is another gift of higher altitudes. The stars look strikingly close, almost hanging in mid air. Night will have its share of eerie sounds made by distant glaciers. On the distant hill-sides in the Bhagirathi valley, we see small fires here and there. These are the high altitude graziers. What an isolated life they lead!

Dawn comes with full glory. We are in the middle of a meadow. Nandanban is a grassy field, about one kilometre broad and five kilometres long. The height varies from 14,250 feet to 15,000 feet. In early August, nature seems to hold a flower show here. Do come to see. The hill-sides are covered with many flowers. The Gaumukhi tea plant grows all around. (See Gangotri). Rearing its head from distant shades is the domed summit of Kedarnath. The Shivalinga is already ablaze with the glow of the morning. Bharat Kunte and Bhrigu Panth offer spectacles of light and shade.

Today's route is to move along Nandanban. Chaturangi is bounded on both sides by low irregular shaped spurs the higher parts of which recede hundreds of metres and can be seen jutting out in rocky peaks or jagged ridges. The mountains expose a barren expanse of stone and rock. We are not yet in the zone of perennial snows.

Moving on we notice animal droppings at places. We are in the land of *barhal* and other members of high altitude animal world. The snow-leopard performs the important function of maintaining balance. The snow-fox with its beautiful tail is sometimes seen. There are birds, mainly the snow-cock and chughs. We also encounter numerous spiders hiding in nooks and corners. Rain and snow-fall bring out hosts of mosquito-like insects. They do not bite. In fact their system seems to have some greenish substance instead of blood. Beyond all this, may be the reign of the *Abominable Snowman*. And, for all you know, he might have named 'Man' as '*Abominable*!'

Moving through a lunar landscape, we come to a hanging glacier, named Vasuki. It descends from the Vasuki Parvat. Just across this is our second

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day's halt on the banks of lake Vasuki Tal. Looking towards right, we see the summit of the mountain Vasuki Tal nestles high up on the plateau at the very feet of this mountain. There is an enchanting reflection of snow peaks in the lake. It is again growing cloudy. The wind is howling down the valley and heavy clouds are chasing each other in the sky. An occasional glimpse of snow-tips appears as though they are supporting the very heavens. It is drizzling now. Snow-fall will start soon and then evening will arrive with a freshly washed look. An icy night will then descend the valley with all its eerie sounds and occasional thunders.

The glorious morning that follows brings fresh hopes of reaching the objective where Vasuki Tal is glittering with the reflection of the shapely Bhagirathi Sisters. There is also a thin layer of ice on the lake in some portions whilst others have been broken by the wind. We are now in the sub-zero temperature zone. We are at a height of 16,100 feet. There have also been some night visitors to the lake as the hoof marks indicate. Animals seem to be many in number. No one shoots them here.

Our third day's destination is the Chandramukhi Parvat; so named because it looks like the crescent moon. It is a difficult walk. Our day's journey takes us over stony wastes crossing three glaciers, the Satopanth or the Dudhiya glacier, Suryalaya glacier, so called because of intense reflections, and the Sita glacier. The Bhagirathi Sisters have now hidden their coy faces. The upper portions of the Shivalinga are still visible. Satopanth is passed to the right and looks like a table top. The Dudhiya glacier is a broad valley-glacier moving down from Satopanth to unload its cargo into the Chaturangi. It has its own hanging tributaries. Snow-drifts become more frequent and at last some stretches of the path are completely snow covered. We have now reached a narrow valley enclosed on all sides except a narrow passage leading to the left. We are at a height of 17,000 feet. Today we bivouac on ice. Another afternoon of mild shower and snow-fall passes. At night a gale howls down the valley. It produces strange wailing sounds like subdued cries of a host of women. This phenomenon is common in the higher valleys. I have noticed it nearly in most of the passes including those I visited in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.

Right up and in front are vast snow-fields. To the left is the Chaturangi glacier near its source. It is snow white. To the left across Chaturangi is the gully through which we must move to Kalindi Khal. We are in an intensely cold zone and it is time to know a little more about the effects of cold and high altitude on the human body.

Of all the hazards associated with movement in high altitude, pulmonary oedema is the most serious and dangerous. Its main cause is insufficient oxygen though the exact pathogenesis and susceptibility factors are not yet clear. Requirement of oxygen in higher regions goes up but availability is reduced. This affects the structure of blood so as to enable greater

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absorption af oxygen. The lung volumes are increased and their capacity goes up. Due to anoxia, the capillary endothilium in the lungs get damaged and a discharge of seous fluids causes oedema of the lungs. The adverse effect spreads to the heart, the kidneys and the brain. The lungs get clogged up slowly and a man may choke to death. Those are the technical details. The symptoms and cures are more important for our purpose. A healthy body must expel the liquids. The first symptom of impending danger of oedema is that a person does not urinate. A tablet of Lasex or any similar medicine should be taken for immediate relief. Another symptom is that the lips turn blue registering a lack of oxygen. This is normally followed by a foamy discharge from the mouth. This is a danger signal and the sufferer must be removed to lower altitudes and given concentrated oxygen inhalations from a cylinder. Altitudes at which pulmonary oedema generally strikes is about eleven thousand feet and above. No cases of diseases have ever been recorded up to 10,000 feet. The prevention being better and cheaper than cure, it is better to follow the rules of nature. No sudden induction and no undue exertion. Personally, I feel that a vigorous and conscious bout of deep breathing exercise (*pranayam*) in the morning before walk, during rest on the way and at the end of the day is the surest prevention. Avoid smoking and alcoholic drinks. Movement should be slow and steady. Refuse to exert yourself. Take rest frequently.

And now a word about the effects of cold. Intense cold at high altitude, has an adverse effect on the mind. Hypoxia brings about an insidious reduction in reasoning power, with a tendency to make one lazy and careless, indecisive and lacking in judgement. It is important to guard against this tendency. Low temperature alone is not nearly as dangerous as a combination of the wind and the cold. For instance, the chilling effect produced at a temperature of 35°F with a wind velocity of 40 KPH is the same as temperature of minus 35°F with no wind. This is called wind chill factor. Impaired circulation is the primary cause of cold injuries. Adequate circulation keeps extremities warm and provides the much-needed oxygen and nourishment to them. The extent of injury is influenced by the intensity and duration of initial exposure and length of time before circulation is restored. The average duration of exposure to intense cold to produce cold injuries is about ten hours; but may range from one hour to five hours in case of some who are extra sensitive.

Physical injuries are chilblains, trench foot and frostbite. Chilblains are allergic reactions to the cold in susceptible individuals. The affected area becomes red. There is intense irritation which is replaced by blue tinged blisters and pain.

Trench foot is caused by prolonged exposure to a mild degree of cold combined with dampness. A temperature below the freezing point is not necessary in its case. Muscular and circulatory inertia are contributory

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factors. In the initial stages, feet get white, cold and numb, later they become red, hot and painful. Mild cases may subside. In severe cases, infection may spread, resulting even in the loss of toes.

Frostbite occurs as a result of exposure to sub-zero temperatures. The skin and deeper tissues get frozen. The parts normally affected are the nose, ears, fingers, toes and feet. The affected part becomes white and lustreless. Immediate treatment may result in complete recovery. Otherwise, depending on intesity and severity of exposure, blisters and gangrene may develop. Frostbite manifests itself in three stages; a temporary numbness which is the first warning. This indicates a loss of circulation and will be restored by a thorough massage. Avoid hot fomentation. The second stage is the appearance of blisters and swelling. The last stage when gangrene sets in can only be controlled by amputation. One thing should be remembered: nature shows no regard for foolhardiness. Bravery is quite different from bravado. You must look after your physical well-being with scrupulous care.

We are now camping above 17,000 feet. Pulse rate is touching 140. Breathing should be deep. Nothing else can help. At night, do not mind the scratching sounds. It will be the move of glacier under your bed! Nor should you worry about the howling women. It is the wind passing through gullies.

On the fourth day, we go on to vast snow-fields. Moving along snow-covered slopes has always been dangerous because of avalanches which have taken many lives. The avalanches are of snow or ice. There are many theories why a huge mass of snow and ice suddenly decides to roll down and take everything in its stride, apart from the belief that it is a manifestation of wrath of the angry gods. The latest theory is that with pressure and heat, the shape of snow crystals changes and their natural cohesion or binding force gets impaired. In case they are on slopes where gravity is greater than their natural binding force, they will slip off to regain the upset balance. A chain reaction sets in. Another theory is that when pyrite, the most common mineral on the hills, gets wet from rain or melting snow, sulphuric acid is formed. This in turn makes the rocks very crumbly. Their equilibrium is upset even by vibrations caused by sound or footsteps. Tons of rocks, snow and ice slides into canyons. As this matter moves down, velocity goes on accelerating. The result is a gigantic amount of energy. Ice avalanches are caused by crumbling of hanging glaciers.

The glorious dawn has beckoned us to move. We are within about two hours' march from the foot of the pass which would involve a climb for another two hours. We cross over our companion, Chaturangi, and enter a narrow gully. It is a sad parting. Walking over rock and snow alternatively, we encounter a snow-wall blocking our way. The pass is to the right. Slow and steady, we move on. There are crevasses on either side. It would be only

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prudent to rope up. Across the pass we walk over snow-fields, stretching for three kilometres. At last we reach an immense ice fall. Do not ever be tempted to slide on snow. You never know where you will land. Moving on the side of ice-fall, we reach the familiar moraine. Five hours of walk at an altitude of more than 18,000 feet seems to have sapped our energy. For a quick revival, take honey in water. Descending, we reach a small lake called Arwa Tal. It has been a tough day and time to halt. Perfect pyramid of Kamet and its surrounding peaks are visible. Strangely, on this side, rain or snow have not become a daily feature.

On the fifth day, we can reach Badrinath if we try hard. However, if you are interested in enjoying the beauty of wild flowers, go slow. Arwa Nullah has a profusion of wild flowers. Take a leisurely walk to reach the rest house at Ghastoli. The last rest house was left at Cheer Bas, seven or eight days back. Take a good rest and thank the Almighty for His generosity.

From Ghastoli, we may move up and cross over into the valley of the Amrit Ganga over the Zaskar pass. Or we may move down to Badrinath and further down to discover the glories of other byways. We presently shall.

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23

Bed of the Daed Sea of Tethys

Niti—Barahoti—Lapthal

WE ARE now moving into an area with some of the deepest gorges in the world. The rivers Dhauli Ganga and Girthi Ganga whose valleys are now on our itinerary were obviously in existence prior to the up-lift of the Himalayas. It is obvious from the matrices of stone in the stratified sides of the gorges.

Starting from Joshimath by road the first place of interest we come to is Tapoban. This is so named because Parvati did *tapasya* here to win Shiva, the lord of mountains. There are a number of hamlets of the *sadhus* on various slopes. Close is the site of Bhavishya Badri. There is also a hot spring at Tapoban. Moving ahead of Tapoban we pass the village Lata at a distance of 13 kilometres. Lata has an ancient temple of Nanda Devi and a cave with a Shivalinga called Ambakeshwar Mahadeva. Climbing up the slopes near Lata, one can see Mount Changa Bang resembling the dome of a temple. A view on the night of the moon is unique.

Mount Dronagiri is visible from some places on the road. It is believed that *sanjivani buti*, the life-giving herb that revived Lakshman was found at Dronagiri. The place from where a whole hill was taken away by Hanuman is visible even to date. There is also a beautiful peak nearby, called Hanuman, 19,930 feet high, which serves as a dwelling place for the god.

The Rishi Ganga joins the Dhauli at Reni. *Sapta Rishis* of Hindu mythology live in the higher regions of Rishi Ganga. It was here that Vishnu brought them during *jal pralaya*. The Rishi Ganga itself caused a *jal pralaya* in 1971. I saw it happen. There was a cloud-burst in the upper regions of the Rishi Ganga and at places the walls of the Rishi gorge gave way. This blocked the fury of the Rishi Ganga by temporary *bunds* at places. Soon the pent-up force of water pushed these dams aside. Moving the debris ahead, the Rishi blocked the Dhauli Ganga at Reni. The process was repeated between the Dhauli and Vishnu Ganga at Vishnu Prayag. From then on a dual drama was staged. The Alaknanda was also blocked at Birehi by the Patal Ganga which brought the water of the

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Gohna Lake, the banks of which had given way. The quantity of water in the Alaknanda from Birehi downwards was greatly reduced. This was the lull before the storm! The fury of the Vishnu Ganga broke the shackles at Vishnu Prayag and moved on to the dam created by the Patal Ganga. So great was the annoyance of the Alaknanda that she rammed against the *bund* at Birehi with a 200 feet high wave. The *bund* gave way and what followed can well be imagined. A number of vehicles were washed away with no trace to date. Long stretches of road were washed away necessitating a new alignment. Many bridges were twisted out of shape. The fury caused a lot of misery.

The pilgrims for Badrinath had congregated in large numbers at Birehi on account of temporary blocks on the road. The local businessmen took advantage of the situation and started selling a *puri* for a rupee. A *sadhu* was seen warning true devotees that they should move up to the shelter of the higher hills and disappeared! Some people heeded his advice and climbed up the slopes. Sinners perished one and all. Who was that *sadhu*? (For the other version, see: Badrinath).

Moving along, we come to Jumma, a small halting place. A little above Jumma is a hot spring called Bap Kund where a bath is very refreshing.

Malari, the last village along the road has its own *panchayat*. The people of Malari have a rich tradition of folk dances and music. At Malari some graves were discovered in 1956 with utensils kept alongside the dead. Since this was never a Hindu custom, the place must have been at one time an important centre for trade, where some traders from Mongolia might have died. Similar graves have been found in Iran. In 1948 a German engineer, Au Fschnaiter, whilst digging a canal in Tibet came across similar graves. To date, it has not been possible to arrive at the ethnic origin of the people who buried their dead and kept food along side the graves. Shall we ever be able to know what all happened in the realms of pre-history?

Malari is the junction of our routes ahead, leading on to Niti, Barahoti, Lapthal and Topi Donga. Niti is a beautiful valley at the head of which lies Niti pass that figured in Pravesh. The road between Delhi and Dehra Dun invitingly announces the distance to Niti pass. Niti can also afford a hazy view of Kailash. The valley is inhabited by the handsome race of Bhotias. You can move in for a few days and see Bampa Nag, Ghamsali *devata* and the cave with the autogenous Shivalinga. Near the pass, some fossils of marine life are also found.

The area around the confluence of the Dhauli and Ganesh Ganga offers a unique spectacle at day break and sunset; the valley is full of golden light. This is due to reflections from the glaciers of Kamet. The name of Kamet, *Kangmed* in fact means glacier fire. This glow pervades the whole valley. Seeing is believing.

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Ghamsali is located at the charming confluence of the Dhauli Ganga and Amrit Ganga. Moving up the Amrit Ganga valley, we can cross Lakshman pass (Bhyunder pass) and descending through the Valley of Flowers reach Badrinath via Kunt Khal pass or Hem Kund and Gobind Ghat. It was through this way that the Valley of Flowers was first visited by a European, Col. Edmund Smythe sometime in eighteen fiftees. It was, however, popularised by Frank Smythe through his famous book *Valley of Flowers*. The area is rich in wild life, and one can still come across the most hunted and poached of the species of the musk deer. The valley of the Amrit Ganga can serve as an ideal site for a musk deer farm. The area is rich in flowers, iris, violets, roses, potentillas, primulas, anemones and numerous others that lend a unique charm to the setting. The entry into this enchanting area is obtained at Malari. Crossing the Dhauli over a foot bridge, we enter an area of lofty *deodar* and pines. The beautiful landscape lures you on. Passing through a vast flower-studded plain area of Riul Bagar, we reach Bampa. The temple of Bampa Nag is located near the village. Viewing the hillside near the temple, we notice a prominent ziz-zag green patch of bushes and grass which look like an approaching python. That is the village deity Bamba Nag. Nag *puja* is performed in September-October when a lot of goats are sacrificed.

The second deity of the valley is Ghamsali *devata*. Looking from Ghamsali up the valley of the Amrit Ganga, the eye is arrested by the bust of a human being with a perfect beauty of form. That is Ghamsali *devata* which is also called Har-Gauri. Viewed from a different angle, it appears that Shiva is reclining with Gauri's head on his chest.

The Amrit Ganga is also associated with the Pandavas for about five kilometres above Ghamsali are two rock bridges built by mighty Bhim. The river is also called Kali Ganga by some and Saraswati by others.

Between Ghamsali and Niti, we come across a huge cave with a roof eight metres high. The cave contains an autogenous Shivalinga which is about eighty centimetres tall. A big fair is held here on the *Janmashtmi* day when *sandal* and *padma* wood paste is applied on the *linga*.

From Ghamsali, we can move to Timersain and cross Chorhoti Dhura pass leading into the Barahoti plains, an area of rolling plateaus. On the way, we pass through rich pasture land with many graziers out with their herds. Chorhoti is a difficult pass. On one shoulder of the pass is a matrix of stones which keep falling off around the clock with possible respite during winters when the area is covered by heavy snows. Towards the Barahoti side of the pass, there is a small but beautiful lake where Parvati is believed to bathe. *Apsaras* are said to visit the spot when the spouse of Shiva is not around.

Barahoti can also be reached directly from Malari. We can move along the Girthi Ganga up to Sumna, the confluence of the Kio Gad and

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Yong Gad. On the way to Sumna, we come across highly twisted and turned rocks. There is a chaos of jumbled spires of horizontal strata. We pass through a narrow gorge with an ever crumbling hill face. During 1971, the whole hillside came down forming the Sumna lake which is more than a kilometre long and 20 metres deep. In the Barahoti plains, there is a tepid water spring supposed to be a bathing place of Parvati. At Rim Khim, just short of the Barahoti plains, is a memorial to some soldiers who laid down their lives for the motherland.

From Sumna we may move along Kio Gad and reach Lapthal Bowl, an area resembling the Ooty Downs. From the Bowl we can move to Banchha Dhura pass which affords an excellent view of Kailash. Lapthal is a gigantic graveyard of the ammonites of the dead Sea of Tethys. One may collect or dig up at will. A visit there will amply repay the efforts. Another striking feature of the Lapthal Bowl is the unique beauty of the blue dome of sky which acquires a rich hue at sunset and sunrise. From Lapthal Bowl one may climb across the Khingru Dhura pass on to Topi Dunga and enter the Gori valley across Unta Dhura pass. Alternatively one may move directly from Malari to Topi Dunga through the immense Girthi gorge with a sheer drop of 8,000 feet. Along the route are some small temples built by graziers which house fine specimens of *shaligram*. From Topi Dunga, we may enter the huge areas of Lapthal Bowl over Khingru Dhura. The rock formations and vast quantity of marine fossils tell the story of uplift. This undoubtedly is the bed of the dead Sea of Tethys. Will the proud sea ever come back into existence?

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24

Katyur

The Valley of Two Rivers

THE VALLEY of the rivers Saryu and Gomati is called Katyur. The area evinces our interest as not only is it exceedingly beautiful, but it has also a large store of legends. The Katyuris, the first known dynasty of Uttarakhand shifted their capital from Joshimath to Baijnath. Since that time, the area has been referred to as Katyur.

The valley owes its very existence to Kotmai Bhramari Devi. It is said that in the ancient times there was a huge lake in the area which served as a dwelling place for a *rakshas*. He would come out at night and indulge in all sorts of depredations. Whenever men tried to catch him or kill him, he would vanish in the lake. The people at last erected a small temple of Jagdamba *mata* and prayed to her for deliverance. Jagdamba agreed and told her devotees that she would not only kill the *rakshas* but also drain out the lake so that none could ever bother them again.

The *rakshas* came to know about the arrival of the *devi* and disappeared in the lake. Jagdamba became *bhramari* and kept hovering over the lake. The *rakshas* was confined to his residence. Faced with starvation, he had to come out in the end. As soon as the *rakshas* appeared, Bhramari Devi stung him to death. She then cleared the way for the lake which started draining off as river Gomati. The lake bed became habitable and people moved in. The Katyuri *rajas* also shifted their capital to Baijnath. Perhaps the legend of Bhramari Devi contains clues to some pre-historic fight. But does the under-water hiding of the *rakshas* hint of a submarine and use of a hovercraft by Bhramari?

Of the many religious shrines of Katyur, Uttarakhand *nivasis* have maximum faith in Kotmai Bhramari Devi. The main shrine of Bhramari Devi is located at a distance of three kilometers from Baijnath. *Pujas* are offered during *Chaitra* and *Bhadon* when *ashta bali* is performed. First of all a buffalo is sacrificed. The blood is collected in a vessel. There is a small hole in the altar. The blood is poured in it. The hole has a capacity for only half a kilogram but all the blood disappears in it. It means that Kotmai has accepted the offering. A man then goes to a temple at the

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base of Mount Trishul and returns with some items of *samagri*. The power bestowed by Kotmai enables him to complete in a single day a journey which takes three days. The *samagri* is offered to the banana plantation immediately at the rear of the temple. One plant starts shaking. This plant is then offered to Kotmai Bhramari Devi in a ceremony called *kelikatna*.

Bhramari Devi is particularly kind to barren women. They should stand a whole night in front of the temple with an earthen lamp held in one hand. Their desires are sure to be fulfilled.

A notable mythological event of Katyur is the marriage between Shiva and Parvati that took place at Vaidya Nath or Baijnath. There is a group of temples at the exact site which are believed to have been constructed by the Pandavas. The temples have prettily carved icons of Parvati, Ganesh, Chandi, Surya and Brahma. The image of Parvati has all the feminine grace carved into a stone. The main temples are called Bamani Deval, Vaidya Nath and Kedarnath. There is also a museum which is opened in the afternoon. Nearby is Talihat, the old capital of Katyur. Temples of Lakshmi Narayan and Rakshas Deval are located at Talihat.

Entry into Katyur may be obtained from various sides, namely (i) Karna Prayag-Gwaldam-Baijnath (ii) Almora-Ranikhet-Someshwar-Kausani-Baijnath (iii) Almora-Berinag-Chaukori-Bagheshwar and (iv) Pithoragarh-Thal-Chaukori-Bagheshwar. On the the first route, passing through the picturesque valley of Pindari, we climb up to Gwaldam. Nearby is the Badhan Garhi ridge which is source of the Gomati. The ridge has an old temple of Kalika.

The Gomati has its own legend. In the olden days, there was a man called Atma Ram. His wife was called Dhundhali Bai. She was a very beautiful woman. They had all the comforts in life but were unhappy because they were childless. Atma Ram very much wanted a child and performed several penances. God appeared to him in the shape of a *sadhu*. He gave him a fruit to be given to his wife for the desired effect. In the meantime, Dhundhali was told by some of her friends that childbirth would spoil her beauty. Now where is the woman who does not want to be called beautiful and would take kindly to the loss of her charms? So she did not eat the fruit and gave it to the cow instead. She, however, confided in her husband that she was with a child and managed to keep up appearances. As luck would have it, her younger sister was also with child. She promised to hand over the infant to Dhundhali Bai at the proper time. At last the day came. Dhundhali's sister handed over the child to her. Atma Ram named him Dhundhkari. Dhundhali went to the cattle shed to milk the cow. Lo and behold, the cow had also given birth to a human child who had big ears. She brought the child home. Atma Ram named him Gokarna or one having ears like a cow. The children grew up together. They were of opposite nature. Gokarna was god-

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fearing whereas Dhundhkari was cruel and reckless. Gokarna spent most of his time in the company of *sadhus*; Dhundhkari fell on evil ways. He turned out both Atma Ram and Dhundhali Bai in their old age. The hapless couple died of starvation. Dhundhkari started living with women of easy virtue. He would even resort to stealing to feed his *harem*. Finally, one of his mistresses murdered him out of jealousy. No one performed his last rites for who would come near his vile body? He became a *bhoot*. Gokarna came to know of this and decided to purify his soul. No river would, however, give its water even for *puja*. Gokarna came to Badhan Garhi and did *tapasya* for many years At last God came to him and told him that he would make a river flow from the place of his worship which would make people remember his name always. The river Gokarnamati was then born. The last rites of Dhundhkari were performed. The river Gokarnamati is now called Gomati.

From Almora or Ranikhet we may reach Katyur via Kausani. On the route we pass through Someshwar. It is believed that when Brahma created the universe, he also created the *navagrah*, Surya, Chandra, Mangal, Budh, Vrishpati, Shukra, Shani, Rahu and Ketu to attend to the various affairs of the universe. Of the *navagrah*, Chandra was also called Som. He got married to the 27 daughters of Daksha Prajapati. Chandra was a great devotee of Shanker and spent a lot of time in *tapasya*. He had no time to attend to some of his young and charming wives. One of them got so desperate that she gave a *shap* to Chandra that he should suffer from consumption. Shiva could not see his devotee suffering. He redeemed Chandra by a boon that whereas he would wane for 15 days of the month, for the remaining fortnight he would wax. Also he would ever adorn the forehead of Mahadeva. Love would prosper when he waxed. So it happens to date. On full moon nights, lovers meet in each other's eager arms. The place where Chandra sat for *tapasya* came to be called Someshwar. The Shankar temple at Someshwar was constructed by the Pandavas.

Someshwar also has another distinction i.e. the presence of a powerful *bhoot* that has now been active for more than two centuries. During the reign of Aurangzeb, a *maulvi* came here to convert people to Islam. The Goll *devata* did not mind voluntary conversions, but he resented the use of force in matters of religion. He appeared in a dream and warned the *maulvi* who refused to listen to his good counsel. The *maulvi* died in a violent accident and became a *bhoot*. During night time, he does not let any one cross the bridge. At times fires are seen in pitch dark nights. Approach them and they would disappear. No one dared to come out at night for years. The people then decided to appease the *bhoot* by constructing a small temple. An offering of incense is invariably made at this shrine.

From Someshwar we reach Kausani, famous for its magnificent view

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of the snows. The area between Kausani and Someshwar offers a beautiful landscape. About the beauty of the valley Mr. Batten writes : "Perhaps in no part of the hills can anything more beautiful be seen than the valley of Kosilla (Kosi) in Bora-ke-Rao, especially near Someshwar. The mixture of the natural scenery of wood and water; the landscapes displaying fertility of innumerable fields; and the sprinkled human habitations remarkable for their pretty architecture make up a picture which it would be difficult to equal in any part of Asia."*

The river Kosi takes source at Kausani. The government rest house at Kausani commands an excellent view of snow from the hazy outlines of Kedarnath to Api. After the rains, the sky is clear and free of the lightest cloud. The whole range of the snowy Himalayas stands out and gets shrouded in the azure haze merging imperceptibly in the bluish sky. The view is magnificent. Kausani was a favourite spot of Mahatma Gandhi. His famous book, *Anashakti Yoga* was written here.

From Almora we may also go via Chaukori. En route, we pass through Gangoli Hat. When Shiva was carrying the charred body of Sati, her tongue fell at Gangoli Hat. It is believed that Shri Adi Shankaracharya built the temple at Gangoli. *Puja* at the temple is held during *Chait* with *ashta bali*. The sacrificed buffalo is given to *Shilpakars* for eating. Some years back, they refused to accept it and the buffalo had to be buried. What devastating rains, floods and epidemics hit the area! Many people fell ill. At last they had to perform the ritual again. The buffalo was eaten as usual and then only the area was rid of the calamities sent by the gods. Ten kilometres beyond Gangoli Hat is the famous cave called Patal Bhuvaneshwar. It is the abode of *Veni Nags* called *Pingal*, *Mul*, *Phani*, *Dhaul*, *Vasuki* and *Kal*. The cave has to be entered only in a half crouching position. Anecdotes from the *Mahabharata* are carved on the walls of the cave.

On this route, with a little diversion, we can also reach the famous temple of Jageshwar. En route we pass through Devi Dhura which has huge boulders. They are supposed to have served as the sporting pebbles for Bhim. Two of them have deep fissures created by him. Jageshwar has its own legend. After the *yajna* of Daksha Prajapati and disintegration of the body of Sati, Shiva came to Mount Tankara for *tapasya*. Nearby lived the *Sapta Rishis* with their families. The wives of the *rishis* got attracted to the mighty Shiva sitting in *samadhi*. They grew cold to the *rishis* who were upset by the strange behaviour of their wives. On discovering the cause, they abused Shiva without knowing his identity. Shiva got annoyed and fixed the *rishis* in the skies where they remain to date as the constellation Ursa Major also called *sapta rishi*.

The Shivalinga was called Yogisha by the *rishis* from which the place

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came to be called as Yogeshwar. The main temples at Jageshwar are Bal Jageshwar, Mrityunjaya, Navagrah, Surya, Pushti Devi and a number of others. The temples contain a treasure of stone carvings which are exuberant expressions of the Hindu religious art. It is believed that these fabulous temples were constructed by the Pandavas during their exile. Whenever the exiled princes were in doubt about any matters, they would ask the image of Shiva who would answer their queries and give advice. At times, the statue would even wake them up from sleep to tell them about the vicious moves of Duryodhan. The place, therefore, came to be known as Jaga-Ishwar or the god who woke up. That is another origin of the name. It is believed that even to date the icon speaks to genuine devotees. It is believed that after Kalki *avatar* of Vishnu, the icon at Jageshwar would again start speaking freely. Some time back the *murti* was stolen by some evil man. It has since been recovered. According to popular belief, such disregard for religion would only hasten the Kalki *avatar*.

Another peculiar belief about Jageshwar is that Shiva eliminates the suffering of his devotees. A relative or even a friend of the sick person should visit Jageshwar. He should offer prayers and then go to any tree and beg for the transfer of disease to the tree. It works!

The *pandas* of Jageshwar are believed to be the descendants of a *Bhat* from Kashi and are called Baruas or Baroras. The Chand *rajas* were always cremated at Jageshwar. Their *ranis* sometimes became *satis* there. The Rohillas also came to Jageshwar but were turned away by a swarm of bees sent by the gods. No damage was caused to the main temples though the lesser ones suffered from their ravages.

Starting from Pithoragarh for Katyur we pass by Dhaj, a place famous for its temples of Jayanti Devi. The high ridge called Jyanti Dhura commands an excellent view of hills of Pithoragarh, Almora and distant ranges in Nepal. Religious fairs are held during *Chaitra* and *Asuj*. There is a belief that people with impure thoughts can never reach the temple. They tire off half way through. Anyone who cannot reach the first time, can never do it even later. The entire hill is without water. There are, however, some invisible springs where the devotees' vessels are automatically filled up.

Two main towns in the Katyur valley are Bagheshwar and Baijnath. They are connected by a beautiful road passing through a lovely countryside. However, do not venture out alone at night, lest you should meet the ghost of Khai Kahaj. Once upon a time, many many years ago, a Gujar family was camping in this area. A handsome young man sent his buffaloes into the river for drinking and bathing. One buffalo was being carried away by the current. The youth jumped after it and was washed away. He became a ghost. He is occasionally seen chasing a buffalo. In case you happen to meet a man with a buffalo, go your way and do not look him in the eyes.

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Bagheshwar lies at the centre of the valley. Guru Nanak Dev had passed here during the course of his third travel. The town has its own story. A *sadhu* once sat in the bed of the Saryu for *tapasya*. The river got blocked. Lack of water in the lower riparian villages led the crops to wither. The people got worried and prayed to Lord Shiva. Shiva thought of an ingenious plan. Parvati became a cow and Shiva pounced on her as a lion. The medicant intervened to save the cow thus releasing the river. The exact place of this occurrence came to be called Bagheshwar or the tiger-god. Rishi Markandeya also performed *puja* at Bagheshwar. He sat on the *shila* near the holy confluence. It is still called Markandeya Shila.

Near Bagheshwar is a place called Subh Garh. This was once the capital of the *daitya* called Raja Sumbh whose full account has been given under the chapter on Kedarnath. Having destroyed the army led by Nishumbh, the *devi* came and destroyed Sumbh at his capital at Subh Garh. The world was thus rid of yet another reign of terror let loose by the evil forces.

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25

The Pindari Glacier

WE NEXT plan to visit the beautiful and famous Pindari glacier. Lying at a distance of 170 kilometres from Almora, this was for quite some time the nearest glacier to the main arteries of communications. Any one who liked a bit of adventure in the higher alps, proceeded to Pindari. The log books of the rest houses enroute are full of views of those visitors and provide interesting reading. If you choose to go to Pindari, do not miss them.

The Pindari is situated at the base of Nanda Devi and Nanda Kot peaks. The latter looks like an axe from Pindari side and is called *Bankatiya* or *Kulhari* both meaning a wood cutting implement. The glacier is three kilometres long, 365 metres broad and its snout lies at 3,657 metres. The ideal time for a visit is before or after the Monsoons. The latter is better, for then numerous blossoms welcome the visitor. The climate is also comparatively better.

The Pindari is a celestial river and is considered to be one of the channels of the Bhagirathi descending from the golden locks of Shiva. The source of the river is, therefore, as sacred as Gaumukh and Gangotri and is called Galeshwar. The water at the snout is considered as pure as *Gangajal*. It is also as sacred and endowed with medicinal qualities. It can even cure tuberculosis. The river has a total span of 190 kilometres, 60 flowing in Almora and the rest in Chamoli.

The Pindari glacier may be approached from Almora, Pithoragarh or Karna Prayag. Starting from Pithoragarh, our first place of halt is Didihat, a small yet beautiful town with a thriving carpet and shawl industry. From Didihat we descend to Thal, on the bank of the river Ram Ganga, through beautiful landscape and fine views. From Thal we climb up to Chaukori, which, along with Berinag, has some extensive tea gardens. The tea here tastes like cocoa. Chaukori is the best place for a glimpse of the Panch Chuli mountains. From Chaukori the road snakes down to Bagheshwar, our base for further move to the glacier.

From Almora, we may come via Pithoragarh, Berinag or Kausani. The routes have been fully covered during our visit to Katyur. From Karna

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Prayag, we come via Narayan Bagar, Tharali, Gwaldam, Bagheshwar. We have already travelled on this road but we have not yet met the ghost of Tharali. The story goes like this.

Once upon a time, long long ago, some Tibetan families came over and settled in the area of Gwaldam—Tharali. They would eat any animal including rats, frogs and dogs. The animals soon came to realise that their numbers where dwinding and they fled to safer areas. So the *Huniya* families found it difficult to entertain guests for guests had to be served with meat dishes. Once a visitor came from Tibet to see his relatives. As luck would have it, there was no meat in the house. The man of the family went to the adjoining village to buy meat. The sky was overcast. He saw one dog on the way, caught it and tying a chain around its neck started leading it to the house. The rain started and the intensity of the downpour went on increasing, Soon the nullahs swelled. It was pitch dark and there was not even a star to guide his way. Both man and dog were washed away by a stream and became ghosts. Even now, the man is sometimes seen leading his dog with a chain around his neck.

Bagheshwar has already been visited during our study of Katyur where the origin of the name Bagheshwar has been given. The temple of Baghnath is quite near the road and has huge bells donated by various devotees. The temple was constructed by Raja Laksmi Chand in 1450 A.D. There is yet another legend about the origin of the name Bagheshwar. After the marriage of Shiva and Parvati at Baijnath, Vishwakarma, the celestial architect constructed a residence for Gauri and Mahadeva at the confluence of the Gomati and Saryu. When the building was ready, the *vag devata* (god of speech) showered choicest praises glorifying its beauty. The place was, therefore, dedicated to Vag Ishwar by Umapati and came to be known as Vegeshwar which in its present form has become Bagheshwar.

For a visit to Pindari, we move on the road Bagheshwar-Tejim along river Saryu up to Kapkot. We then follow the foot track branching off to the left. The road moves on to Kharbugar, a vast open area about seven kilometres ahead and joins Thal-Mansiary road at Tejim. In times to come, this could well be an alternative road to Pindari. As for the present, it is too prone to landslides.

Moving along the right bank of the Saryu towards Kapkot, the vegetation is tropical in the first few miles with clumps of bamboos. Here and there some orchids clinging to the trees offer a pretty sight. At places, there is extensive growth of wild *podena* (peppermint) plants and *dalchini* trees. Along the way, we pass Balighat, an area of a sheer cliff. Raja Harak Dev had many of his enemies blinded and hurled them into the river from high banks. Hence, the name Balighat or altar of sacrifice.

Kapkot is about 25 kilometres from Bagheshwar. It is an industrial centre and some fine *dans* and multi-coloured shawls may be

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purchased from here. A tough climb starts from Kapkot and first view of snow is obtained a little ahead of Kapkot. Passing through Loharkhet, we arrive at Dhakuri at 10,500 feet. The first glimpses of the celestial river are obtained here. An excellent view of the snows of Nanda Devi Sanctuary is a special feature of Dhakuri. The sence is truly magnificent and one of the very best in Uttarakhand. The snow-covered peaks seem to be piercing the very skies. Vast fields of snow descend from the towering citadels. Seen against the background of mammoth rocks and crags the landscape appears to be lunar in character. We are suddenly transported to the realm of the supernatural.

The glacier is barely 20 kilometres from Dhakuri. The journey beyond is along the river Pindari. We lose height and reach an area of rich verdure, oak, pines, *deodar*, rhododendron and many flowers of various types. The Pindari is a turbulent river, filling the whole valley with its terrible roar. The area around is studded with water-falls. Some of them are more than 300 metres high. Most of them are seasonal. During May, they are non-existent. After the Monsoons in September, some descend by more than a thousand metres. The setting is simply stupendous. In the words of E.S. Oakley, "But words and figures can give no idea of the glories of such a scence. They are truly the wonderful works of God and among the grandest sights on the earth." The area beyond Dhakuri is also rich in wild life. All types are represented. Even the rare Himalayan panda has been occasionally seen.

Our next brief halt,—that is in case we want to stop—is at Dwali. We can as well make up to Phurkiya. However, why not go slow and enjoy the scenery? Dwali is located at the confluence of the Pindari and Kaphini. We have lost height and are now at 8,000 feet. The place has rare endowments of natural beauty. The jungles resound with the songs of many varieties of birds koklas, monal, tragopan and doves. The koklas pheasant seems to be in great numbers and their tormented calls of '*Kakh lukaye, kakh lukaye*' seem to pierce the valley (See the legend of the koklas pheasant in the chapter on Folk Lore) The dove reminds me of another legend which I read in some book in my college days. A dove is called *Dekaktura* in Greek. The story goes that when Chirst was carrying the cross, a Roman soldier took pity on him. Along the road, an old woman was selling milk. The soldier approached her for a cup of milk for Christ. She demanded eighteen (*dekaokta*) coins. The soldier had only seventeen (*dekaopta*). Seeing the condition of Christ who was almost exhausted, the soldier requested that she should accept 17 coins. She stuck to her demand of *dekaokto*. Christ was crucified. The old women was cursed to become a dove and keep repeating *dekaokto, dekaokto*. If she ever agrees to accept *dekacepto*, she would again become a woman. If however, she decides to demand nineteen (*dekaemmea*), the dooms day would come.

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Moving through magnificent scenery, we at last reach Phurkiya, the last hamlet just seven kilometres short of the snout. From here the route passes through a narrow bleak valley strewn with huge boulders. Enroute is Bhim-Udiyar, were the mighty Pandava is believed to have lived a while. The cave also served as a shelter for Jagdamba Devi from Mahishasur and it still serves as the winter residence of Nanda Devi. (See Rupkund). The snout of the glacier comes in view a little ahead of Bhim-Udiyar. One hour of stone to stone movement and we reach the holy snout, Galeshwar

The first person to record the movement of the glacier was General Strachey. He observed in 1848 that the mean daily movement in the uppermost part was 5.3 inches, in the lowermost part 4.8 inches and in the middle portions, 10 inches for the upper half and 9.4 inches for the lower half. In case we take an average of all these, the mean movement of Pindari would come to about seven and a half inches per day. Taking this movement as a measure, the snow falling at the source of the glacier would take about 44 years to reach the snout. Thus in 1977, the snow reaching the snout really fell in 1933, even before the Second World War. Thus the snow that falls, say, at the birth of a child, sees him a middle-aged man by the time it reaches the snout. How time passes!

From the Pindari glacier we can move up the moraine and reach Traill's pass. G.W. Traill, the first commissioner of Kumaon was desirous of finding a direct route to Johar so as to give a boost to the trade. Hence he offered exclusive grazing rights in some areas to anyone who discovered a direct pass. It was one Malak Singh Buda who made it. He was made a village *patwari* at the salary of five rupees per month! Very few people have climbed this pass, though some graziers cross it off and on. The last notable personalty to cross the pass was Mr. Dharam Vira, a former state governor. For the more adventurous, it will be an excellent idea to try the pass. We can also cross over to Gwaldam from Wacham.

A visit to the glacier is memorable in more than one way for it represents Uttarakhand in miniature. All types of vegetation is found, beautiful landscapes, severe climatic variations and a large variety of the animal life is seen in just one trip to the glacier. For those out for fun and experience in a condensed form, nothing like a trip to Pindari. If you are planning a visit and it is the month of May or September, get going.

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26

Rupkund

The Lake of Mystery

RUPKUND IS a small glacial lake situated on the north-eastern corner of district Chamoli in the lap of the famous peaks, Nanda Gunthi and Trishul. The lake is 70 metres long and is estimated to be more than 17 meters deep. It has an oval shape. On its banks and the area around lie the remains of scores of men who perished there a number of centuries back. Some earthen pots and some ancient weapons of war are also found. There are many theories and legends about these human remains.

For a proper understanding of the legends of the area, a knowledge of classic faith in Nanda Devi, the presiding deity of Uttarakhand is necessary. The names of the peaks around Nanda Devi give a clue to this faith. Nanda is the spouse of Shiva. The *Trishul* of Shiva, therefore, stands guard in front of Nanda. The peaks around the goddess are Nanda Khat, the bed of Nanda the Nanda Kot fort and Nanda Gunthi, the veil of Nanda. It is said that the demon Mahishasur propitiated the Hindu trinity, Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, and demanded a boon that from each drop of his blood, a new Mahishasur should rise. The *devtas* inadvertently granted the boon to him not realising that this meant eternal life. Thus empowered, Mahishasur started troubling *rishis* and their families. The holy men prayed to the gods to save them from the depredations of the *asura*. The gods grew quite sick of Mahishasur and sent their combined *shakti* as Jagdamba to eliminate the menace. Jagdamba reassured the *rishis*. Mahishasur came to know of this and flew into a rage. He challenged Jagdamba. The fight started. From every drop of his blood a new Mahishasur would emerge. Their number swelled. They almost overpowered Jagdamba. She fled for life. The demons gave her a hot chase. Hard pressed, Devi went to the *haldi khet* (turmeric field) and requested for a hiding place. *Haldi* refused. Devi put a *shap* on *haldi* so that it would ever remain underground and emerge only to be ground into powder. Since that day, *haldi* grows as a root. She then went to *purna* field but it also could not hide her.

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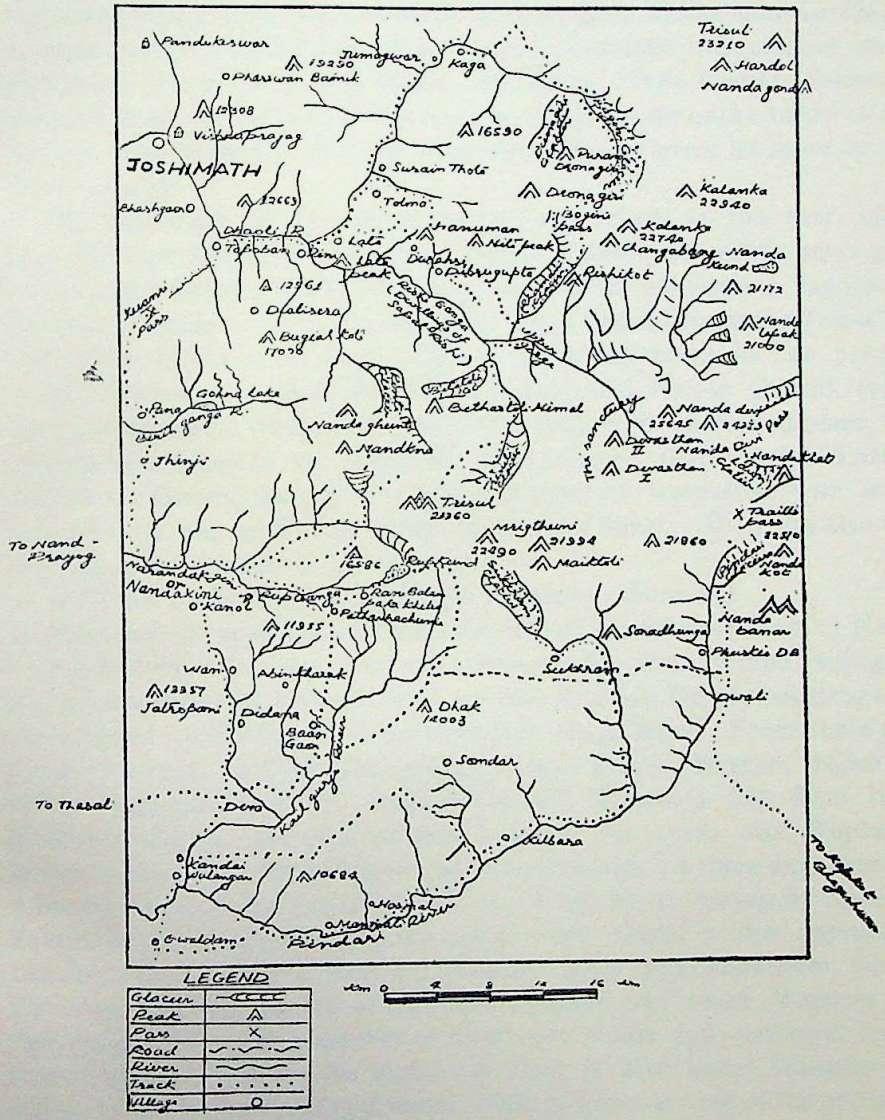
RUPKUND - THE LAKE OF MYSTERY
PINDARI GLACIER - NANDADEVI SANCTUARY



LEGEND

Glacier	
Peak	
Pass	×
Road	
River	
Track	
Village	O

km 0 4 8 12 16 km

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Purna was accordingly cursed that only one *purna* crop would grow in a year. The Devi then went to the potato fields but they also declined to help her. She gave them a *shap* that they would remain hidden underground and people would dig them to boil them. The demons kept on chasing the Devi. At last Jagdamba fled to the Himalayas who gave her shelter. In the much-needed respite, Jagdamba created Kalika and asked her to drink the blood of the *asuras*. The demons reached the place where Jagdamba was resting. A severe battle started again. Kalika immediately set to work and went on drinking their blood. Jagdamba then created more *shaktis* like Virahi Devi, Braj Mukhi, Narsinghi, Singh Rohini. Santoshi, Shitala and so on. At last the incarnations drank up the entire blood of the demons. The world was thus rid of another reign of terror let loose by the forces of evil.

The last stage of the above battle was fought in the vast snow fields between Trishul, Nanda Kot, Nanda Gunthi and other snow pinnacles in the famous Nanda Devi Sanctuary. After the victory, Jagdamba married Mahadeva, the most powerful deity. Shiva put up the *Trishul* in front of her residence on Nanda Devi to guard the entry to her private realms. Nanda Kot (fort), Nanda Khat (bed), and Nanda Gunthi (veil) were also created. None dare enter this holy and enchanted place, for trespassers are sure to be punished. It is believed that between Trishul and Nanda Gunthi, there is a huge pile of shoes of trespassers who were devoured by the snakes adorning the neck of Shiva. There are also the half-consumed remains of many others.

With this background, we can now proceed to Rupkund.

Rupkund is approachable from the side of Gwaldam-Tharali or Nand Prayag-Bedeni. We may reach the starting point from Karna Prayag or Bagheshwar-Baijnath. From Tharali, we pass through Deval, Lohajang and a number of small villages to reach the last village Bann. From there onwards, we pass through the camping sites of Bistola, Bugiyal, Bagichha, Pather Nachuni, Biraratoli, Kailash-Vinayak, Bagubasa and Rani Bala Ampa Ka Khelra. Keeping the base at Bann, one could visit Rupkund in two to three days depending on individual stamina. A three-day schedule is better. Guides are available at Bann. From Nand Prayag we come to Ramni, Bedeni, and then along the above route. Deval is also approachable from Gwaldam by a short-cut covering barely seven kilometres. From Deval we may also proceed to the Pindari glacier and reach Wacham or vice-versa. There are a number of forest rest houses and *panchayat ghars* where one could stay for the night. A road is also under construction which might cut the walking distance. This is, however, one of the prettiest areas where a walk is always a pleasure.

Many mysteries are revealed in the legends of an area, which more often than not give a clue to some past occurrences. Passed from mouth to

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mouth they acquire individual coloration, and thereby they are periodically embellished in their passage from generation to generation, and sometimes from the realms of pre-history into history.

Once, hundreds of years ago, the king of Garhwal had a young daughter of peerless charm and beauty. The king of Kannauj had a handsome son. This prince named Jasidhal came to Garhwal for *shikar* and stayed as a royal guest. He fell in love with the princes, Bala Ampa and demanded her hand in marriage. So keen and deeply engrossed was he in love that the religious ceremonies normally performed at marriages were ignored. Religious rituals were either telescoped or short circuited. Goddess Nanda was also not given her due and so she was annoyed. As a result, the kingdom of Kannauj fell on evil days. The enemies of the state gained strength. The royal astrologers were consulted by *rani* Bala Ampa. They ascribed this bad luck to the negligence in observance of proper respect to Nanda Devi. Bala Ampa was with a child. Lest any evil should befall the offspring, a *jath* (religious procession) was immediately ordered to proceed to Nanda Devi. King Jasidhal jeered at the blind faith of the queen. He was, however, not willing to annoy her. Hence he reluctantly gave permission for the *jath*. The *jath* started with great pomp and show and reached Bann. Jasidhal wanted to combine pleasure with duty. Even *Hurkiya* girls (See Dancing Girls of Uttarakhand) were taken along. This further aroused the wrath of Nanda. The *Hurkiyas* were first to be hit. As they proceeded, singing lewd songs, they were transformed into stone. Since that day, the exact spot of this occurence is called *pather nachauniyan* or the petrified dancers. Some buglers, drummers and other musicians with the party were next to be hit and all became ghosts. Even today the sounds of bugles and drums are heard at times as this unearthly procession moves along the area. A little later, Bala Ampa had labour pains. She was taken to a cave where a baby girl was born to her. The cave came to be called as *Bala Ampa-ka-Khelra* or the maternity home of Bala Ampa. This cave is about 200 metres short of Rupkund. As the *jath* arrived at the lake, the elements hit them with full fury. A severe blizzard started with attendant avalanches which engulfed the whole party. Here they lay for centuries till discovered in the early 1950s.

That much for the legend. There are also some other attempts to explain the mystery. The literal meaning of Lohajang is a fierce fight with iron weapons. It is believed that a battle was fought between two neighbouring states and one party of the soldiers was overtaken by the fury of nature. The second theory is that some pilgrims from Tibet got caught up in an avalanche and perished en bloc. In our visit to Badrinath, a legend about the flight of Vishnu from Tibet has been included. Many pilgrims from Tibet kept coming for a pilgrimage to Badrinath. One such party was caught up in an avalanche and perished. Yet another version

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is that Muhammad Tughlaq sent an army to attack China. One contingent lost the way and perished in the Himalayas. It is possible that perhaps there once was some route from this side to go into the valley of Gori Ganga but has now been closed.

The bodies were first unearthed in 1954-55. On being given the news of the gruesome find by some villagers, retired divisional forest officer Hari Kishan Matwal visited the area. On his return, he gave the news to various people. Then, one Mr. Jagmohan Singh visited the place and brought a skeleton for investigation to Lucknow. The skeleton was dated as 600 years old. The shoes worn by the men are carved with gold-coloured threads which is even now a prevalent fashion in Rajasthan. Besides the skeletons, one can still find wood, coal, ash and pieces of earthenware.

A visit to Rupkund should preferably be planned after the Monsoon, the ideal time being around the beginning of September to the middle of October. Before the rains, huge ice-fields are encountered which can be a nuisance. In case you are keen on moving in company, you may join the annual *jath* which proceeds to the area for a *darshan* of Nanda Devi every year in *Bhadon*. There are two types of *yatras*, *malli yatra*, the small pilgrimage, and *thuli yatra*, the large pilgrimage. The former is every year and the latter, once in 12 years. All the intending *yatris* collect at the village Naini Gram in the temple of Bhagwati. Many villagers bring image of Nanda Devi on palanquins. *Puja* is held day and night at the Bhagwati temple. The *Devi* enters the body of a devotee who starts shaking in a possessed manner. That is the signal for starting the *yatra*.

Malli yatra is normally up to Rupkund and at times only to Baan Gaon. *Thuli yatra* has a separate story. Every twelfth year, there appears a four-horned ram in the herds of Tehti! That animal acts as a leader for conducting the *thuli yatra*. News of its appearance spreads like wild fire. Great preparations are at once started Many people volunteer to join the *yatra* and perish in the snows to attain *moksha*. On the appointed day, all the roads seem to lead to Naini Gram. The four-horned goat is decorated with colourful *gulal* and jingling bells. The *Devi* enters the body of a devotee. Buffaloes and goats are sacrificed and the *yatra* starts. The procession reaches Rupkund. From here they go beyond to Chhota Kailwa and Bara Kailwa glaciers. The devotees have a dip in the Kali Ganga which takes source here and meets the Pindari at Deval. From there the procession moves on to the snow-fields between Trishul and Nanda Devi. At last they reach the battlefield of Jagdamba and the *asuras*. From there the four-horned goat moves up and runs towards Nanda Gunthi. The devotees watch it disappear and then come back. Men are counted at Rupkund. Invariably, there are losses. The palanquin of Nanda Devi is then brought back to Naini Gram.

This custom has been prevalent for centuries. Was it one such party that had perished at Rupkund ? Who were these hapless men ? What happened ? Will it ever be possible to know the truth ? Will the mystery ever be solved ?

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27

Johar—Gorichhal

The Valley of Gori Ganga

WE NOW proceed to visit the valley of river Gori Ganga. In this valley, Mansiary is the main town. The valley is called Gorichhal in the lower reaches between Mansiary and Jauljibi, and Johar between Mansiary and Milam. The Gori Ganga is a turbulent stream along its entire course of 100 kilometres from Milam glacier to its confluence with the Mahakali at Jauljibi. The name Gori is given to it because of the milky water near its source. This route is of historical interest as Karna, the son of Kunti and Surya passed this way to colonize Tibet. The armies of Raja Baz Bahadur Chand proudly marched through Johar and subdued Tibetan authorities.

Colonization of Johar has its own legend. In the distant past, there lived a race of men with a thick coat of hair covering their entire bodies including the tongue. They had two small states: Halduwa, extending from the snowy ranges down to Mapa, and Pingaluwa, from Mapa to Laspa. On the higher snowy regions lived a bird of prey called Puru. By spreading its wings, it could cover the whole valley. It turned a man-eater. Many families were consumed by the bird but its hunger was insatiable. Many people fled to the jungles and died of starvation.

Shakya Muni was then living in a cave near Banchha Dhura. He came to know of the plight of the people of Johar and decided to rid them of the menace. He had a brave devotee. Shakya Muni summoned him and asked him to proceed to Johar to rid the valley of Puru. He gave him a bow and arrow and told him that after killing the bird, he would become the ruler of Johar. Shakya Muni also provided him with a demon to act as his guide and help him if needed. He told his devotee that his guide would assume many different forms but he should not be afraid and was to follow him throughout. The disappearance of the guide would mean the end of the journey. The man and demon started on their long and arduous journey. Near Kungribingrila, the demon assumed the form of a dog (*kungri*) and hence the place came to be called Kungribingrila, the pass of the dog.

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The man kept following his guide. Near Topi Dunga, the guide became a bear (*topi*). Near Dol Dunga, he became a stag (*dol*) and at Unta Dhura, he assumed the form of a camel (*unt*). They proceeded forward and near Bagh Udiyar, the guide became a tiger (*bagh*). The place came to be called as Bagh Udiyar meaning cave of the tiger. The guide then assumed the form of a hare and disappeared. The man went to the nearest village where he met a woman. On seeing him, she first laughed and then wept. He asked her the cause of this strange behaviour. She said, "I laughed because after many days, I have seen a man, and wept because tomorrow the Puru would eat me and the day after would be your turn." He consoled her and told her of his mission. Soon afterwards Puru came down with a great resulting noise to devour the woman. The devotee of Shakya Muni, however, took out his weapons and put the bird to death. The couple then burnt a fire and the man asked for some salt. The woman replied that there was no salt in the valley. The man told her that he would go back to Shakya Muni to get salt. She should keep the fire burning till his return. So he went back and not only asked for salt but requested him to open the route to Tibet. This was granted. The man and woman then collected the remaining people hiding in caves. They all settled in a new village which came to be called Milam, meaning a meeting place. It is noteworthy that Shakya Muni is still worshipped as the giver of salt in Johar.

Johar has the most affluent society in whole of Uttarakhand as the ideal combination of nature being bountiful and men, hardworking, is found here. Women weave fine *pashmina* shawls and make beautiful patterns on small carpets called *dans* (See Folk Industries). The Gita Satsang Ashram was started at Mansiary in 1946. The institution has done signal service for the uplift of Harijans.

Entry into the valley may be obtained through Thal-Tejim road along the bank of Ram Ganga Eastern and then across Kala Muni pass into Johar. At Thal, there is an ancient temple of Baleshwar constructed by the Pandavas. A fair is held at the temple for one week on *Baisakh Purnima*. On the way to Tejim, homage must be paid at '*Ek-Hathia Deval*', a temple of $10' \times 7\frac{1}{2}' \times 3\frac{1}{2}'$ carved out of a huge rock $30' \times 17' \times 17'$ by a one-handed devotee. The State P.W.D. is planning a road from Ghorpatta to Mansiary via Sandeh. When complete, Mansiary will be nearer by about 45 kilometres. The existing road passes through extensive terraces looking like gigantic staircases of the gods. Tejim is a big village lying at the confluence of the Jakala *nadi* and Ram Ganga. A man-eater has been active in this area since 1970 and has claimed more than hundred lives. No one has ever seen the beast. Superstition has that the man-eater is actually the ghost of a Garhwali Brahmin who died in the area due to negligence of the inhabitants! How can any one see him? From Tejim, one road takes us direct to Bagheshwar whilst the other bifurcates for Mansiary.

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On the latter we reach a small but neat looking village called Kuitty. This was once the capital of a princely state. Relics discovered whilst digging for construction purposes bore the stamps of royalty. The village Girgaon commands a fine panoramic view. At Kala Muni, you are at once close to the perfect pyramid of Panch Chuli. The road takes us right up to Mansiary. At the entry of the town, there is a small tea shop with the imposing title of 'Sarhaddi Tea Stall of Gang Pani.' Seasonally, this shop used to move to Lake Gang Pani and even Jhandi Dhaura Pass. Functioning at above 16,000 feet, this could have been once the highest tea shop in the world.

As an alternative route of entry, we could go up to Jauljibi and reach Mansiary through the mule track along river Gori Ganga. The stretch of the Gori for Jauljibi, to Mansiary is the land of *Rajis* and *Hurkiyas*. Sites of big annual fairs of Jauljibi, Thal and Bagheshwar are close at hand. Many *Hurkiya* families have therefore settled in Gorichhal. For an exclusive performance, you may still visit the valley and enjoy a song and dance done by young girls. Gorichhal has also another charm. At one time, road to Mansiary was planned through Gorichhal. In view of this, some enthusiastic young block development officer got apples planted in bulk in Moti Ganga valley near village Bona. In season, these may now be had for one eighth of the price elsewhere.

In the Chiplakot jungles, there are two beautiful lakes flanked by myriad blossoms including legendary *brahma kamal*. The lakes are named Chipla Kedar and Najuri Mund. The bigger lake is also called Kakrola Kid and serves as a place of pilgrimage for the villages of Johar. It is approximately 350 metres in circumference. The smaller one is 275 metres in circumference and is a place of pilgrimage for people of Kalichhal. At the time of *yajno paveet*, (wearing of sacred thread) boys are taken to these lakes. After marriage, newlyweds visit the lakes, bow to the attendant deities and make vows. These lakes are the site of a biennial fair. It is started with a *puja* to the reigning deities followed by a mass bath. Many valuables are left on the banks as offerings. No one ever seems to remove them or may be no lout or a civilized man ever passes that way!

Gorichhal is an area of rich verdure with lush green landscape. There are a number of beautiful waterfalls. Since the area is a little away from the general run of the poacher, wildlife is fairly abundant.

In Johar, two spectacles are unforgettable. The first is a close view of Panch Chuli peaks. These mountains are the beauty queens of Uttarakhand. There are other pyramids like Kamet and Tirsuli but nothing to beat the perfection of tallest of the Panch Chuli. The sunset ot Panch Chuli sets the entire area ablaze. The second spectacle is seasonal; a rich growth of wild dahlias. These must have been planted at one time but have now proli-

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ferated into wild profusion uncared by man but bountifully pampered by nature.

Moving out of Mansiary on way to higher zones, we first come to the area of Lover's Leap; a scene of grim tragedy where two desperate lovers jumped to death. Looking straight up, along the Gori, we see three peaks, called Trishul by *Joharis*. This shows the hold of Shiva on Kedar Khand. Passing the village Dharkot, known for its fine carpets and shawls and fragrant honey, we reach Hilam. From here we can cross to the left bank of the Gori and reach the village Ralam. A track from Ralam leads to the pass called Lipu ke Than, Ralam or Hardol, crossing which we can reach Darma. The name Hardol reminds of grim the tragedy that overtook the women's expedition to Hardeol on 30 May 1974. A joint Indo-New Zealand expedition was out on an attempt to scale Hardeol peak near Milam. On 30 May, Miss Ramchandran, Miss Sreela Kundu, Miss Jill Tremain and Miss Vicki Thompson were hit by an avalanche at a height of 6,940 metres and disappeared. Later, there were wild rumours that the girls were seen in a Nepal village. Hope lingers. Mountains will never reveal the mystery. In these very snows the brave girls lie somewhere and we can never reach them. The talk of conquering the mountains!

Going beyond Lilam, we pass through the Gori gorge separating the great Himalayan peaks of Nanda Devi and her attendants, Nanda Kot, Nanda Khat, Nanda Ghunthi on one side and Panch Chuli on the other. By now, we know that this proves that the Gori was in existence before the upthrust of the great Himalayan Range. Bagh-Udiyar is located in the middle of the gorge. Its name seems to convey the meaning literally for there are some families of panthers (baghs) residing in the area. They also have no food shortage. The area is alive with many birds including *monal*, white capped redstart and the Himalayan cuckoo.

The gorge opens into a vast beautiful valley near village Martoli. On both sides are many deserted villages now seasonally inhabited by a few graziers. The closest view of Nanda Devi *massif*, an embodiment of serenity, light and might is obtained at Martoli. There is an old temple of Nanda Devi at Martoli where a fair is held every September. Prior to 1962 ten buffaloes and 300 goats were sacrificed at the temple. The *pujari* called the *Martoli ka Baba* is quite an adept in the Himalayan herbs of which there is no dearth.

Moving on, we reach Barphu, a large village with a library. Between Barphu and Martoli, a *nullah* descends from Nanda Devi massif which leads us to famous Traill's pass.

Milam is the last and the biggest village in Johar. It is only partially occupied during summer. Just outside the village, there are monuments dedicated to two soldiers who died in an avalanche. For our 'tomorrow', they gave their 'today'. There is a *Mane* wall dedicated to Shakya Muni who

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made colonization of Johar possible. Bhotias hold this will in great esteem. The glory of Milam is the superb view it commands. Looking down the valley, the eye is pleased by the lush grassy fields dotted by flowers. To the right, the Nanda Devi raises its head like a mighty queen surveying her region. At the back stands the Tirsuli pyramid. Seen through limpid air, every element assumes magnificent colours. From Milam, the snout of the glacier is about five kilometres. It is located at 11,600 feet, is eight metres high and five metres broad. Keeping our base at Milam, we should visit Shangas Kund and Surya Kund, two small lakes of tepid water. They are located on the left flank of the glacier at distances of 7 and 13 kilometres respectively. Surya Kund has its own story to tell. Legend has that Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, was a great devotee of Surya. She was once having a bath at this Kund. Surya come to meet her. She conceived Karna. Kunti was later married to Raja Pandu at Pandukeshwar and gave birth to the five Pandava brothers. Prior to her marriage, she had assigned Karna to Vishnu Ganga at Lakshman Prayag. Women desiring a son come to Surya Kund for a bath. A *yatra* and holy dip on *Janma Ashtami* is of special merit. A fair is also held at Surya Kund for community prayers on *Shravan Purnima.*

Moving along river Kali or Gunka, we pass through beautiful camping ground of Shillong and reach Dung. A night halt is indicated. We are in the higher altitudes and the process of acclimatization must be given its due time. Moving from Dung, and looking up a side valley, we are suddenly struck by the sight of a man standing with a rifle. A view through translucent clouds is awe inspiring. We fear that the man would not permit us to pass. It is, however, just a rock formation and is called Sentrys' gorge.

We next pass by the side of the Jim glacier, also called *safed* glacier. It is a vast open ice-field without moraine matter. Fresh snow imparts a hue of dazzling white to the whole atmosphere. To the right is a glacial lake beyond which is a line of peaks with perennial snows. Strange sounds keep coming from the peaks. The climb for Unta Dhura starts after the lake. The pass has an evil reputation of blizzards and avalanches. Five huge rocks on the pass look like men. They were erected by traders to ward off evil spirits. On other side of the pass, we pass through vast snow fields and reach Gang Pani lake. From here we may proceed to Jhandi Dhura and Kungribingrila or descend down to Topi Dunga which we have already visited. The Gang Pani is a fine lake and some families of swans nest nearby during summer. They come out on sunny mornings. Another bird seen in plenty is the snow-cock. Looking around, we notice *brahma kamal* growing in wild profusion. It is in this idyllic setting where the Sarhaddi Tea Stall once functioned; a small outpost for the weary *yatri*—now no more.

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28

Darma

The Valley of Free Love

POPULARLY KNOWN as 'the valley of free love', Darma or Dharma has many attractions. But the best is that it lies under the shadow of the noble Panch Chuli mountains ; a group of five spear-straight peaks. According to the local belief, they are the abode of Miunli or Miyula, the goddess of this valley. Inevitably, there are many legends about the peaks. Panch Chuli literally means five fire-places. Normally, the peaks are surrounded by smoke in the morning as well as evening. As per popular belief the Pandavas reside on the peaks and burn their fires. Some also call Panch Chuli to be the fire-stalls of *Panch Parmeshwar*. Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Gauri and Ganesh. Illusion of smoke around the peaks is actually caused by strong gales blowing in the higher regions in which snow particles fly as dust. The mountains are also named Panch Choli meaning 'five friends'. There is an interesting legend about this name. Once upon a time, long ago there were some families who had no son but only daughters. Their parents worried a lot. What would happen to their flocks; who would take them for grazing; who would look after them in their old age; and so on. The girls resented this attitude. In what way were they inferior to the boys ? They decided to take the herds for grazing near the abode of their goddess Miunli and also pray to her for relieving the worry of their parents. The goddess told them not to return to the inconsiderate parents and stay on with her. To date the 'five friends' tend their sheep and remain in their homes on Panch Choli.

Whatever be the other meaning of the second legend, one thing is certain that women have a very high status in Dharma. They decide their own affairs. In marriages, their decisions are final. Issues are decided on the personality and looks of the man! Sometimes, some of the wealthiest men who are not good-looking remain without a wife. What has wealth got to do with happiness ! 'How much land does a man need ?' Women bestow the greatest attention on their turnout and looks. They are blessed with radiant complexions and long tresses. A great care is taken of the hair which is arranged in many plaits. They are fond of silver and costume

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jewellery. The clothes are mostly home-spun and comprise many strands and stripes of gaily-coloured parts: red, green, blue, yellow, mauve and so on. They take great delight in spinning their own '*am lugara*'. After all, good dress matters even after death! It is this robust attitude to life and desire to extract maximum happiness from it that makes Darma a delightful place for a visit.

The custom of *Ranga Banga*, full details of which have been given in our study of 'The People' is followed with full force. The women are in charge of this valley. What matters is the satiation of ones basic urges that bring happiness. A life-partner is one of the most important acquisitions. If one is not good enough, why not try someone else and so on. They live a full and free life. Darma is one of the most promiscuous societies in the world. There are no taboos.

An entry to the valley is obtained at Tawaghat which may be approached from Pithoragarh via Charma, Askot, Jauljibi and Dharchula. The first few kilometres from Tawaghat are hot and humid. The climate has given rise to rich tropic verdure. Many orchids with colourful blossom are seen clinging to the trees.

Starting from Tawaghat, we first reach the small village of Nue from where a gradual but constant climb starts for Sobala. Along this route, Sobala is the first place with apple orchards. Immediately behind Sobala is a big cave called Khar-Udiyar or the 'cave of death.' The cave is about three metres in diametre at the mouth. Of the depth, there are various accounts placing it at eight to ten metres. All creatures entering it drop dead in no time. From time to time, there have been experiments for discovering the cause of death. It appears that it results from suffocation due to the presence of carbondioxide. The gas is strongest in the spring and rainy seasons. The effect progressively lessens after September and the cave is quite safe in about December-January.

Two miles beyond Sobala is the village Dar which has a hot spring. There are many natural caves near the village. From Dar one may approach Gorichhal by Ganan Dhura passing through the *Raji* country and visit Chiplakot lakes. Near Sela, there is a monument of a soldier who died in a landslide. 'They also serve...' Nagling is known for its abundant growth of *soma* plant, an effective remedy for asthama. From Sipu, one could cross the high pass Ralam Dhura and descend into village Ralam in Johar. We may also cross over to 'Vyas' through passes called Shinla and Dawe.

Darma is rich in wildlife. It is a paradise for the botanist. Near the passes, some marine fossils are also found. But above anything else, Darma should be visited for its healthy people and colourful women : it is a 'Kingdom of queens'.

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29

Vyas

The Valley of River Mahakali

OUR NEXT area of visit is truly a land of legends named after Rishi Vyas, the famed composer of the *Mahabharata*, the longest poem ever written with 220,000 lines. Vyas was the son of a fisher-woman. He is believed to have been of mixed Aryan and Dravidian blood. He also re-arranged the *Vedas*, wrote *Bhagwat Purana* and an *Up Purana* about Uttarakhand. It is difficult to imagine Hinduism without Rishi Vyas. Many Brahmins scattered all over the country claim descent from the *rishi*. The surname Vyas is in fact a certificate of high intellect and noble demeanour.

The *rishi* lived at Kalirang in the valley of river Mahakali. There are a number of natural caves in the area which served as his residence. As per local legend countlesss centuries back, there was a severe drought in the valley. Crops failed for three consecutive years. The *muni* then arrived in the valley and did *tapasya*. A bumper crop followed. People were saved from hunger and starvation. The *rishi* is therefore worshipped to date. His blessings are invoked before any event of importance like a long journey, sowing and harvesting, or a marriage. He obviously had magical powers. Vyas Bhotias would proudly tell you of the time when Shiva decided to visit their *rishi*. Shivaji jeered at the frugal meals offered to him during the famine and advised the food be immediately turned into pure gold.

Next to Rishi Vyas, people of this valley worship Garuda, the mount of Vishnu. Legend has that their chief once shot at a bird with an arrow in the plains of Banbassa. The arrow pierced the bird but it flew off as though nothing had happened. Next year, when the hunter went to worship at Kailash, he saw the same arrow with which he had shot the bird. Since that day, Garuda is worshipped as a celestial mount.

Vyas is the name of the valley of river Mahakali. The river gets the name Sharda on entry into plains. We have seen this river at Banbassa and Tanakpur. Main stream comes from Lipulekh pass. As per popular belief, however, Kali emerges from Kala Pani, where there are a number of dark coloured springs. Fed by many glaciers and springs, the Kali is

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truly a Himalayan waterfall, a storehouse of awsome power. It also has its own story to tell. In the remote past a *muni* sat in deep meditation at Chhialekh. Kali disturbed him. The *muni* blocked her way. There was no outlet. A huge lake formed. Kali prayed to Shiva. The lord of mountains gave her an outlet. The area of Chhialekh still bears the signs of a lake land.

During winter, the springs at Kala Pani freeze. This has led to the belief that during the cold season, Kali goes to Nepal to visit her sister.

Vyas provided the main *yatra* route to Kailash-Mansarovar. It was this way that the ashes of Mahatma Gandhi were taken on 8th August, 1948 by Pt. Hargovind Pant of Almora. It was through this route that throngs of pilgrims congregated at Mansarover for *Kumbh mela* last held in Tibet in 1954.

There are three passes on the border with Tibet, namely Mangsha Dhura, Lampiya Dhura and the famous Lipulekh. Mangsha and Lampiya afford clear views of Mount Kailash. The mountain ranges across the passes are called Gurla Mandhata. They are named after Rishi Mandhata who meditated there. Total extent of the valley is about hundred kilometres. Journey starts at Tawaghat.

From Tawaghat, the confluence of Kali and Dharam Ganga, we may proceed by the upper or the lower route, the former involving climbs and descents and the latter moving in the Kali gorge. So contracted is the deep gorge that the sun rises quite late and sets quite prematurely. On the upper route, a tough climb takes us to Pangu. The village grows some of the finest dahlias and boasts of extensive apple orchards planted under the block development programmes. Once mature, there would be an apple boom.

From Pangu we may proceed directly to Sirkha or go via Narayan *ashram* established by His Holiness Shree 11008 Narayan Swami Maharaj, Swamiji renounced his vast wealth and established his *ashram* for the uplift of the people in 1936. He introduced many social reforms and is remembered with the greatest of reverence. He constructed an elegant two-storeyed building for the *ashram*, commanding a fine view of the serpentine Kali. The building has a gay interior with colourful designs which have now dimmed with age. He amassed a huge library the remnants of which are still quite impressive. He planted an extensive apple orchard which now brings forth a handsome yearly income. The *ashram* is run by a trust but appears to be neglected.

Moving on, we reach Sirkha, the first village inhabited by Vyas Bhotias who are a charming people by all accounts. Sirkha has an ideally located rest house with an excellent view all round. From Sirkha a real tough climb takes us on to Rungling Top, a pass which is popularly called as 'Rolling Top' because of the numerous false crests. From Rungling Top we descend

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to Jibthi. The journey up to Jibthi may be performed in a single day provided one is ready to walk for twelve hours or more. A two-day schedule is however better. From Jibthi, we start descending towards Malipa by a staircase. There is a beautiful water fall between Jibthi and Malipa. During the rainy season, there is an unforgettable spectacle. Just short of Malipa, there is a sheer cliff. The advent of Monsoon creates numerous falls along the cliff. The discharge is scanty but it contributes to the beauty rather than detract from it. Thin streaks and sprays of water sway at the slightest hint of a breeze. As the sun's rays fall on the waters, they get laced with ribbons of rainbow waving like the multicoloured scarf of a young bride. People call in the dance of the fairies. During winter, it is quite a different spectacle. There are naturally no waterfalls but as the snow melts, the water trickles down and freezes at the end of the ridge. The process continues and numerous long needles of ice start hanging from the hillside. As the sun comes up for a short while, numerous reflections from the ice cones hit the eye. This is nature's own *sheesh mahal.*

Passing through Malipa and over many ups and downs, we reach Budhi. It is a large village. Just short of Budhi, there is a huge rock with '*Om Mani Padme Hum*' inscribed on it. It is a relic of the old days. At one time, Tibetans extended their suzerainty up to this area. Baz Bahadur Chand pushed them beyond the traditional boundary, that is Lipulekh. This area obviously witnessed many a girm struggle. There are numerous caves in the hills around where rusted and corroded weapons and dresses of the dead warriors are seen.

From Budhi, a tough climb takes us to Chhialekh which is a vast grassy plateau with numerous flowers. It has an unspoiled beauty of landscape and an excellent view. All around, the snow-fed streams streak down spreading their fingers from the snows to the ribs of Kali. On a clear day the very air sparkles and the mountains ahead transform into dazzling pinnacles of silver. There is a small temple on one side, dedicated to Shiva and Kali, which commands an excellent view.

As we look right, we see Mount Api, the peak across Kali in Nepal. Viewed from Chhialekh and Garbyang, the mountain looks like a sleeping beauty in all details. Higher features on left and right look like feet and head. The tree-line moving up to the right gives the appearance of falling tresses. The twin mounds of Api are the perfectly formed breasts. On a moonlit night, the mountain offers an exquisite sight too beautiful to be described. Api is a peak with a regal personality and anyone who has watched it during moonlit nights must be dreaming of it all the time even though with platonic love.

Moving beyond Chhialekh, we descend down to the sinking village of Garbyang. The sink was first noticed in 1968. It has never been too rapid and the village lives on. Garbyang was at one time the most affluent village

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in the valley hosting a number of pilgrims to Kailash. Some boys and girls of the village still go abroad for education.

From Garbyang we can see two villages in Nepal, Chhangru and Tinkar lying at feet of Annapurna Ranges. About 400 metres above Chhangru and at two hours climb is a cave containing remnants of many men, women and children. There is no vestige of a path leading up and no villager will guide you since, for them, it is the cave of ghosts and goblins. There are many tales and legends about these skeletons which lie here with the secret of their tragedy dead with them. It is said that during one of the contests of strength between the armies of Baz Bahadur and the Tibetans the villages fled to the safety of caves and perished from hunger, thirst and her parents with a small child. One day, the child was playing near a building which was under construction. A stone fell on his foot and some blood came out. That day the progress in construction was very encouraging. The owner thought that if a little blood could make so much difference, the sacrifice of the child would surely lead to its completion. The child was kidnapped and sacrificed. The girl came to know of the tragic death of her offspring and wailed to the gods. If this was to happen to her in her parents' village, where could she go for shelter! The fury of the gods hit the village and entire populace went mad. Many went to the caves and perished there.

From Garbyang a good track takes us to Gunji. Astride the track are some gigantic pillars of stratified earth, sand and single, which contain fine specimens of ammonite fossils. A temple dedicated to *rishi* Vyas is located a Gunji. From here a route along Kuthi Yankti takes us to Mangsha and Lampiya passes. The valley of Kuthi Yankti has many marine fossils which are dug out by seasonal glaciers and avalanches. As we trudge along, the trees are replaced by shrub and juniper bushes. We are now in the arid Zaskar Ranges.

From Kuthi one track goes laterally to Jolingkong, the junction of further rotes to Lampiya Dhura and Mangshaw Dhura. Half way between the route of Lampiya Dhura is a beautiful lake banked by a fine mound. They are called Chhota Kailash and Mansarovar. An annual fair is held at this place on Janamashtmi.

The beauty of an area is enhanced by its people. The Vyas Bhotias are hospitable and charming. On leaving Vyas you miss them even more than this valley of immense charm and beauty.

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30

The Wildlife of Uttarakhand

प्रह्लादश्चास्मि दैत्यानां कालः कलयतामहम् ।
मृगाणां च मृगेन्द्रोऽहं वैनतेयश्च पक्षिणाम् ।। ३० ।।

Among daityas, I am Prahlad; among calculators, I am mighty Time; among animals, I am bagh and among the birds, I am Garuda, the vehicle of Vishnu.

पवनः पवतामस्मि रामः शस्त्रभृतामहम् ।
झषाणां मकरश्चास्मि स्रोतसामस्मि जाह्नवी ।। ३१ ।।

Among purifiers, I am the Wind; among the wielders of weapons, I am the mighty Rama; among fishes, I am the alligator and among rivers, I am the holy Ganga.

Bhagwat Gita

GOD MIGHT have fashioned man after His own image but He manifests Himself in a myriad ways; as a *bagh* (lion, tiger, leopard) amongst the quardrupeds, as *garuda* (eagle) amongst the birds and as an alligator amongst the fishes. In India, we have a tradition of assigning qualities and intelligence almost human in nature to the denizens of the wild. Most of them are inextricably mingled in our folklore and mythology which is full of affectionate references to all living beings. Of the five major gods—*Panch Parmeshwar*—each one has his own mount in the form of an animal or a bird. Brahma the creator, the fountain-head of knowledge, from whose four heads the four *Vedas* were born, has the *rajhans* or the royal swan as his mount. Vishnu the preserver, who has come to earth many times to dispel darkness and save the *prithvi* who sleeps at the bed of the ocean and from whose navel the Earth has sprung like a lotus, has *Garuda* as his *vahana* (mount) and *Shesh Nag* as his *shaiya* (bed). Shiva the destroyer has *Nandi* the bull to ride. Shakti, the female power which mani-

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fests in various forms as Kali, Durga, Saraswati, Shitala, Amba, Santoshi, Vaishno, Nanda, has different *vahanas* in different manifestations; Durga rides a lion; Saraswati, the goddess of learning and eloquence the peacock; and so on. Surya, the dispeller of darkness and bestower of warmth and brightness is constantly on the move on his chariot drawn by seven horses. Not only the *Panch Parmeshwar* but all three hundred and thirty million gods have their own *vahanas*. Vayu, the god of the winds rides a fleet-footed stag. Ganesh, the god of peace and plenty and the remover of obstacles moves around riding a mouse. Indra, the king of heaven, the god, of clouds and thunder has *airvata*, the white elephant with four tusks as his chariot. Kama, the god of eternal youth and love, whose spouse is Rati, the passion moves around on a parrot. Agni, the god of fire, rides a ram and Chandra, the moon, moves around on the *mrig* or the deer.

Birds and animals figure in our mythological tales and ancient literature otherwise too. As the legend goes, when Lord Shiva was relating the story of *srishti rachna* to his consort Parvati, a pair of doves were listening. The pair have been reincarnated again and again to return to the Amarnath cave in Kashmir. In *Kadambari* of Ban Bhatt, a parrot and a horse play prominent roles.

Historically also, India has a tradition of preserving wildlife and showing compassion towards all living beings. In *Arthashastra* of Chanakya, there are clear instructions about the protection of forests abounding in game. In these protected zones, a code of conduct was laid down for all and the laws fully enforced by strict supervision. If some animals were declared dangerous, they were required to be caught or killed outside the preserve so that peace of other inhabitants was not disturbed. These sanctuaries were called *abhaya aranya*. Even Ashoka the Great and Harshwardhan accorded protection to some species. Wild life was obviously a source of beauty to the area and a trade-cum-tourist attraction. In a platter found in Rome, there were some animals and birds mainly *monal* and lion drawn in the map of India. The *monal* has been called *punskokil* in the *Mahabharata*. Yudhisthir refused to go to heaven without his dog. Such was the consideration for animals. Throughout history, people in India have been compassionate and considerate towards wildlife. Till very recently, the farmers in north-west India left a piece of uncultivated land adjacent to their fields to serve as a sanctuary for animals. This was called *banna* which could be a derivation from the term *ban* or jungle. Gone are those days. The pressure of population is constantly eating into the areas of wildlife. Many species are seriously threatened. The greatest pity is that the general awareness regarding them is also lacking.

Large-scale killing of wild animals started with the advent of the Europeans who exploited the jungles for timber and killed animals for their skins, furs and other products. In India, even the most fashionable

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women have almost never taken to wearing of animal skins. In the West wearing of furs and skins has been a status symbol for centuries. It is the West that has destroyed the wildlife in the East. There are representative and revealing passages in many books. In *A Guide to Nainital and Kumaon*, Capt. Murphy in 1906 writes:

> It is *interesting* to read that in 1842 the road through the Terai, at night especially, was very trying for a traveller in a palanquin, the bearers stumbling and falling every ten minutes: the heckery ruts were deep, the poor bearers were constantly slipping. There was not much chance of sleep for the traveller going through the forest at night, for the bearers kept shouting at the top of their voices *every five or ten minutes* for the purpose of *frightening the tigers which were believed to be very numerous.*

About Terai and wildlife there, he wrote:

> The greater part of the country is swampy, covered with wild reedy grass, and with patches of forest. There is *good shooting* in parts of the tract. *Tiger and leopard still abound*, though many a *good bag* had been *made in past years*, annually there is an appreciable *addition to* the *death roll.*

The blood lust of the European, let loose with a rifle in the Indian jungle, has been the primary and main cause of the extermination of wildlife. Much has been said about the hunting sprees by the erstwhile rulers. The matters are highly exaggerated. It goes to their credit that they also created game preserves. Whereas these princes mainly indulged in sport, the European traders vied with each other in killing, with eyes focussed on the export market. It is deplorable indeed that the stooges of the Europeans picked up the habit till it became fashionable to kill. Worst enemies arose in the form of poachers who indulged in indiscriminate killing for trade. Even though the commercial export of the skins ended in 1969 by the order of the Central Government, clandestine trade seems to thrive still as is evident by frequent reports of recovery of skins from the smugglers of various type. If one were to ask as to where the rich fauna of India has disappeared, the obvious answer would be *In the wardrobes and drawing rooms of the West.*

In a treatise on travel, more cannot be said on wildlife preservation which is an entirely different subject.

Preservation of wildlife in India is a state subject. In a vast country like ours, the rationale of this is not difficult to understand. The deer, for example, may be a serious pest in one state but in another, it may be threatened species. But times have changed. Such vast scale depletions have occured in the ranks of wild creatures that formation of a national policy with some regional laxities is the need of the hour.

In exercise of the power under section 64 of the Wildlife (Protection)

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Act, 1972 (Act No 53 of 1972), the Government of Uttar Pradesh have promulgated their policy regarding the wildlife in the province vide notification No 4437/XIV-3-211, 1972 dated May 1, 1974. The Act gives details of various application forms for 'Hunting of Wild Animals,' 'Hunting in Game Reserves,' 'Trade or Commerce in Wild Animals, Animal Articles and Trophies' and 'Sale of Meat.' Some of the important aspects of the Act are highlighted and critically examined in the succeeding paragraphs.

Quarterly Licence fees are as under :

Kinds of licences	*Payable by Indians*	*Payable by persons other than Indians*
	Rs.	*Rs.*
Special Game Hunting Licence	60	250
Big Game Hunting Licence	25	200
Small Game Hunting Licence	10	100
Wild Animal Trapping Licence	1,000	100

Following conditions apply to the licence holders:

(*a*) The licence holder shall be entitled to hunt anywhere in the State other than a National Park, a Sanctuary, a Game Reserve, and a closed Area.

(*b*) While hunting, the holder shall carry the licence with him and shall, on demand by any officer authorised by the State Government in this behalf, produce it for inspection.

(*c*) The holder of the licence shall not sell or otherwise transfer the meat or any other animal article of game killed by him.

(*d*) The holder of the licence shall not hunt other or more animals than those specified in his licence.

(*e*) Except for 375 magnum, no rifle of a smaller bore than 400 HV shall be used to hunt an elephant.

(*f*) No licence holder shall shoot the following wild animals having horns or height of less than the measurement noted below:

(*i*)	Sambhar	76.20 centimetres horn size
(*ii*)	Chital	71.12 ,,
(*iii*)	Hogdeer	30.48 ,,
(*iv*)	Elephant	Below 1.83 metres height.

(*g*) The record of the wild animals killed by the holder of licence shall be furnished within 15 days of the expiry of the licence to the Divisional Forest Officer or Wild Life Wardens concerned.

(*h*) Any person who is entitled to hunt a dangerous animal under these licences and who wounds such animal shall do his utmost to kill-

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the same. On his failure to do so, he shall forthwith inform in writing the issuing officer and the Divisional Forest Officer of the area in which such occurrence has taken place, giving reasons why the wounded animal could not be tracked and killed and he shall also inform the *Gram Panchayat* of the adjoining area of the existence of the wounded animal in the neighbourhood.

(*i*) A licence granted is not transferable.

(*j*) Foreigners on tourist visa can hunt only through one of the Shikar Companies recognised by the Government of India, Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation.

(*k*) Military personnel are entitled fifty per cent concession in the hunting licence fees and royalty on wild animals.

(*l*) Visitors (other than the bonafide students of educational institutions having identity cards or duly authorised by the head of such institution) to a sanctuary/park shall be required to pay fees according to the following schedule:

Entrance Fees	**Park**	**Sanctuaries**
(*i*)	*Foreigner*: Rs. 15 per person for three days and Rs. 5 per person for every additional day.	Rs. 15 per person for seven days.
(*ii*)	*Indian*: Rs. 2 per person for three days and Re. 1 per person for every additional day.	Rs. 2 per person for seven days
Road fee for vehicles		
(*i*)	Light vehicle	Rs. 5 (per vehicle)
(*ii*)	Heavy vehicle	Rs. 20 (per vehicle)
Camera Fees		
Still Camera		
(*i*)	Foreigner	Rs. 7.50 per camera
(*ii*)	Indian	Rs. 2 per camera
Cine Camera		
(*i*)	*Foreigners* (tourists, educational tourists recommended by the Government of India, Ministry of Tourism Aviation, Department of and Civil Tourism).	Rs. 15 per camera
(*ii*)	*Indian*	Rs. 5 per camera
(*iii*)	Permission for making feature films and documentary films may be granted by the Wild Life Warden in charge of the sanctuary or National Parks at following rates:	
Indian		*Foreigner*
(*aa*)	Sound feature film Rs. 100 per day	Rs. 200 per day

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(*bb*)	Documentary film	Rs. 150 per day	Rs. 325 per day
(*cc*)	Feature films	Rs. 200 per day	Rs. 650 per day

The Act gives further details of rules for carrying out trade or commerce in wild animals, animal articles, trophies and meat. Reading through the lines, one thing clearly stands out. A special game hunter has to pay Rs. 240 for the whole year as licence fee; whereas a film maker has to pay Rs. 200 every day. Not that the money matters but the principles do. Do not these rules encourage a shooter with rifle than a shooter with a camera! Isn't it time that shooting with camera should not only be free but fine photographs should also carry prizes? Should not the fees for shooting licences be more than ten times the present rates? Is not complete reorientation called for?

Having acquainted ourselves with the major aspects of the wild life laws, let us proceed to visit the sanctuaries in our coveted land. There are four wild life sanctuaries wholly or partially lying within Uttarakhand: Jim Corbett National Park, Rajaji Sanctuary, Nanda Devi Rishi or Ganga sanctuary and Tons or Govind Ballabh Pant sanctuary.

The Corbett National Park is situated in Patli Doon, the valley of river Ram Ganga western. At the decline of the Mongol power in India, Patli Doon was the meeting ground of the clashing interests of the Rohillas, East India Company, Gorkhas and Garhwalis. The area was covered with primary jungles with no habitation except at Kanda. Wild life was plentiful. Garhwal was the legal owner and decided to protect Patli Doon fully from outer aggression. The jungle was accordingly cleared and cantonments established at Buxar, Hinanauli and Dhikala. To encourage colonization, irrigation channels were constructed and some people also migrated to Patli Doon.

The Gorkhas wrested control of the area from Garhwal and clashed with the East India Company. After the partition of Garhwal, Patli Doon fell in the hands of the British. Cantonments were no longer needed and were abandoned. Remnants of the old canals and some brick kilns can still be noticed at places. Inhabitants soon left for the hills and the farm land got fully overgrown with secondary jungles. Wild life returned in full force once again. Tigers were plentiful and as recorded by Sir John Hewett, Lt. Governor of U.P., one could see the tigers roaming around on roads and footpaths round the clock. Shooting also went on *round the clock!*

Mr. E.T. Atkinson, with his flair for statistics, records that from January 1860 to January 1880, 624 tigers, 2,718 leopards, 4,666 bears and 27 wild dogs were killed in Kumaon district alone. In Garhwal district from 1850 to 1863, 91 tigers, 1,300 leopards and 2,602 bears were murdered. Oh! The wanton murderers!! It continued till it was almost too late.

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In 1935, the Government of the erstwhile United Provinces built the Hailey National Park after the name of the Governor of United Provinces of Agra and Avadh, Sir Malcolm Hailey. The Park is located on the banks of the Ram Ganga Western and was renamed Ram Ganga National Park in 1948. In 1957, the name of the park was changed to Jim Corbett National Park to perpetuate the memories of the famous *shikari* and his exploits with the man-eaters of Kumaon.

The park covers an area of 525.8 sq. kilometres, and lies at a mean-altitude of about 400 metres, the highest ridge being 3,000 metres at Kanda Rest House. The Ram Ganga enters the park in the north-east and after flowing west wards turns south. The park lies on both the banks of the river which has changed course very often leaving behind wide banks and a lot of alluvium. Many streams and nullahs meet the river within the park. This has created an ideal environment for habitation for various types of animals. The scenic beauty of the park is peerless. The Himalayas offer a majestic view near Buxar and the area around.

The entire park is covered with an evergreen forest and thick undergrowth. There are a number of flowering trees, the flame of the forest, *semal* with profuse scarlet flowers, *kachnar* with mauve blossoms and a variety of flowering bushes and creepers. Against the background of light green *sheesham* leaves, the flowering trees make unique patterns and offer unforgettable spectacle. The banks of the rivers are covered with tall elephant grass (*sarkanda*), which is partly cleared every winter by the park authorities to increase visibility. Winters are severe and the raids bountiful. The winter offers ideal time for a visit since a lot of wild creatures from surrounding hills converge in Patli Doon to avoid the chilly cold of the Sub-Himalayas.

The National Park can be entered from any of the two entrances; Dhangadi entrance to the east lying astride the main Ramnagar-Ranikhet road and Kalagarh entrance to the west which is astride the forest road joining Ramnagar and Kotdwar. A complex hydro-electric project is located on the Ramganga at Kalagarh.

Ramnagar is the nearest railway station. Individual routes are discussed in the following paragraphs. All distances are calculated till the entrances. The distance from Dhangadi to Dhikala is 33 kilometres and between Dhikala and Kalagarh, 25 kilometres.

(*a*) *Route via Delhi Garhmukteshwar-Moradabad-Kashipur-Ramnagar Dhangadi*: This route is approximately two hundred and forty three kilometres long. The last petrol pump at present is at Ramnagar. For visitors from north-west India, this is the main route of entry.

(*b*) *Route via Bareilly-Rampur-Kashipur- Ramnagar-Dhangadi*: This route can be adopted by visitors from the East. From Bareilly, it is 180 kilometres. Just five kilometres short of Moradabad, a prominent road sign reads 'TO CORBETT NATIONAL PARK'. From here onwards it is common to the

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previous route.

(*c*) *Route via Nainital-Haldwani-Kaladungi-Ramnagar-Dhangadi*: It is approximately one hundred and twenty kilometres. The stretch between Kaladungi and Ramnagar (39 kilometres) is a gravel road. This route is interesting because Jim Corbett stayed for many years at what is now the Kaladungi Forest Rest House. Two of his dogs Robin and Roshina are buried here. From Ramnagar, one gets on to the main road. A forest road also connects Nainital with Kaladungi.

(*d*) *Route via Ranikhet-Dhangadi*: This is an all weather concrete road approximately one hundred and four kilometres long. In this case, the nearest petrol pump will again be Ramnagar.

(*e*) *Route via Joshimath-Karnaprayag-Ganai-Dhangadi*: This is an all weather concrete road approximately 279 kilometres long. This is the best road for those going south from Joshimath after a visit to Shri Badrinath.

(*f*) *Route via Kotdwar-Najibabad-Dhampur-Kalagarh*: This is also an all weather concrete road approximately ninety eight kilometres long. The petrol pump is at Kalagarh. A gravel forest road connects Kotdwar with Kalagarh.

As mentioned earlier, the park has two main entrances namely Dhangadi and Kalagarh. The functional headquarters of the park is located at Dhikala which is almost at the centre of the park. Office functions only from 1 November to May 31 for during the remaining period, the park is closed. Tourists will have to stay at Dhikala for liaison, guides and obtaining various informations and permissions. The gravel roads radiate from Dhikala in all directions. Based on the habits of the animals and their feeding places, *machans* have been erected at vantage points. All these *machans* are approachable by vehicles. Only the last hundred metres in some cases have to be traversed on elephant back due to the marshy nature of the ground. Elephant rides to various *machans* and view points start and terminate at Dhikala. Visitors have the option of going all along on the elephant or by vehicles. Latest rates for permits are always available from the government tourist officers and the park office at Dhikala.

With luck, one can see the elephant, tiger, panther, sloth bear, large Indian antelope, sambhar, spotted deer, goral, barking deer, wild boar monkeys, porcupine, mongoose, crocodile, *ghasial* (long snouted crocodile) and python.

A variety of birds can also be seen in the park. A guide is very useful to help identify the birds and beasts. Some of the prominent birds seen at the park are babbler, *bulbul*, crow pheasant, paradise fly catcher, flowerpecker, golden woodpecker, horn bill, snipe, robin, magpie, lark, oriole, peacock, curlew, laughing hrush, quail, sand piper, warbler, white stork (*haji lak lak*), scavenger vulture (*eagles' barber*), black partridge, Himalayan wood owl, common hawk cuckoo or the brain fever bird (*papiha*).

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The Ram Ganga abounds in *mahseer* and the Indian trout. Fishing is allowed with a permit.

Though the park is open to visitors from 1 November, it is advisable to visit it during February or March. By that time, most of the wild life is again getting ready to move upwards and visibility is at its best. A drive along the forest roads is always rewarding, any time of the day.

Accommodation and eatables are available at many places, though one should be prepared to rough it out a little. Those planning their own cooking should carry the major provisions into the park. Facilities for cooking, crockery, etc. exist in rest houses and guest houses. A bar also exists in the camp. Tuesday is a dry day.

In spite of the depredations of poachers, the Corbett Park is still a place where animals are free and safe. The jungle noises at dusk with the descending twilight reveal the richness of fauna. A number of birds sing in a crescendo and then abruptly stop off creating a resonant silence. The occassional call of the pea fowl pierces the still night to great distances. Here and there, peculiar laughter of the hyena is heard. Suddenly, a colony of monkeys kicks up a deafening noise. You can perceive the panther on the prowl. Shaking the trees, the violent movement of the colony to higher branches gains momentum as the big cat comes near and then as they are safe, the noises slowly die down. At dawn and dusk, the peculiar call of the partridge sounding like '*subhan teri qudarat*' is heard and in the distance a settler from Punjab gets inspiration to break into a folk song '*kali titri kamadon nikli te udadi nun gash pai gaya*'. The early morning is a memorable time in the park. In the dewy misty jungle lulled by full-throated music of birds and distant calls of the monkeys, the sun imparts a rare hue to the flowering trees. Here and there, you may see an exotic peacock dancing. In our country of colourful pageantry, it has been declared the national bird. It is associated with our history. Alexander took two hundred birds from India. Shahjehan made the famous peacock throne. He is familiar with the tiger, since he is believed to pick out meat from the teeth of the beast. But god has balanced the rose with the thorn. The bird has particularly ugly feet. It is believed that at the height of his fan dance, the bird glances at his feet and weeps. The hen comes to console him and mating takes place.

At dawn, it is also not unusual to find a bevy of quails and a covey of partridges crossing your path. Traditionally, it will be the early riser who will catch the bird in the Jim Corbett Park.

The next sanctuary lying on the south-western border of Uttarakhand is Rajaji sanctuary in the Shivaliks near Dehra Dun. Being most conveniently located for a sport by the brass-hats of Delhi, the area witnessed many a cruel massacre before independence. The sanctuary was established in 1948 after the name of the first Indian Governor General Shri C. Rajagopalacharia. It covers an area of 171 square miles. It is as rich in flora

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as the Corbett National Park and the fauna is generally the same, though less numerous than in the latter. The sanctuary serves as winter residence of the Gujjars with its obvious adverse effects since such an arrangement offers excellent opportunities for poaching. If for nothing else, the proposed settlement of Gujjars in villages on permanent basis purely to safeguard the remnants of the fauna may be a very welcome step.

Whereas Rajaji sanctuary is comparatively well known, the next sanctuary—Tons or Govind Ballabh Pant sanctuary—is more so on paper than in reality. There are no checks, no controls, etc. This sanctuary came into being in 1955 and covers an area of 368 square miles. River Tons, one of the principal tributaries of the Yamuna, flows through the middle of the sanctuary. The area was once a sporting ground of adventurous princes who sought permission from Raja of Tehri for shooting in this region. Unfortunately, sport has been taken over by the poachers who do extensive damage for gains from the clandestine export of skins. The difficulty of terrain in the higher regions is the only saving grace. Wild life which may be encountered here consists of monkeys, barking deer, *cheetel*, *goral*, serow, Himalayan thar, *barhal*, black bear, brown bear, jackal, snow fox, panther and the wary snow leopard. The area is particularly rich in birds and in fact an ornithologist's paradise. Some of the varieties are white-crested kaleej pheasant, *koklas* pheasant, *chir* pheasant-dove, cuckoo, drongo; egret, fly catcher, gold and green finches, hoopoes, ibis bill, pygmy owlet, parakeets, wood cock, whistling thrush, wagtails, red starts, *monal* pheasant, tragopans, Himalayan snow cock and snow partridge,

The very last sanctuary in Uttarakhand which is purely on paper and which some of the officials actually posted in the area are also not aware of, is the Nanda Devi or Rishi Ganga sanctuary. This was formed in 1939 and covers an area of 250 square miles. Most of the area of the sanctuary is inaccessible to general tourists because of high altitude, snow and otherwise difficult terrain. Nanda Devi (25,649) lies in the sanctuary. I have tried to enquire into the circumstances under which this was declared as a sanctuary but to no avail. Neither is wild life particularly plentiful in the area nor is it *that* seriously threatened here. And even if it is so there is not an official within scores of kilometres to inquire into any incidents of the non-observance of game laws. The phrase 'Nanda Devi Sanctuary' was first used by Tom Longstaff, the pioneer climber to signify the difficult ring of peaks around Nanda Devi, which he called 'Nanda Devi Sanctuary.' Whereas that renowned mountaineer meant to highlight the difficulty of reaching even anywhere near Nanda Devi, some sleepy officials of the British bureaucracy might have got a bright idea of getting it declared as a sanctuary! Be that as it may, it is an area of lunar landscapes and pristine beauty. It has all the animals found in Govind Ballabh Pant sanctuary with the addition of the marmot. The area also abounds is snow

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fox and Himalayan hare. Among the birds, the chugh and the rock sparrows are the characteristic representatives. The chugh is jet black in colour with yellow beak and paws and is also called *bhot kauwa* or the Tibet crow. This bird is well distributed all along the Himalayas above 11,000 feet. The chatterings of the chughs roam the heights and keep company to the trekkers. The other bird that lives very high up and is not wary of the man is the rock sparrow, the mountain cousin of the common house sparrow. Their feathers, however, are fluffier, soft and fuzzy and also cover their eyes. They live in small crevices between high boulders. At night, they curl up and put their heads in the feathers; thus breathing the heat back. They seem to like the company of man. I once offered some bread crumbs to them. Pirouetting in the icy breeze and lung-shearing cold, a host of them flew in to have a feast. I was relieved of loneliness. Another bird which is found in these regions is the lammergeyer or the bearded vulture with a wing span of about three metres. It has been called a flying dragon by many and does look like one. It is a pleasant sight to watch a lammergeyer break a bone by dropping it on to a rock from a height. It appears as though the bird has studied dynamics. The bird shares this practice with the eagle of the Sahara who drops stones on ostrich eggs to break them open. The legend in 'Sinbad the Sailor' about flying birds who dropped stones on a ship to sink it is after all based on travel tales!

Wild life in Nanda Devi sanctuary remains in comparative peace and occasionally the sheep of the graziers are the only intruders who vie with herbivores and die for the Predators !

A handsome member of the family of predators, a creature of immense charm and beauty, the snow leopard deserves our fullest attention. I had the unique privilege of living in the close vicinity of this handsome animal for some winters in Ladakh as well as Uttarakhand.

The local names of the snow leopard is *changu* and *heiun bagh*. The word *bagh* is in fact a generic term indicating all members of the cat family. *Bagh* itself is a derivation from *vyaghra*, the Sanskrit name for all members of the family of Felidae, or feline species.

The snow leopard is a dweller of the higher mountains and haunter of the wild silences. He occurs in the entire Himalayan ranges from Ladakh to western Arunachal Pradesh. His local names are *shanku* in Ladakh and Spiti, *barhal hae* in Himachal Pradesh, *sofed cheeta* or *sha* in Kashmir, *changu* and *hieun bagh* in Uttarakhand and *ikar* in Arunachal Pradesh. Sleek and lithe, he is somewhat shorter and narrower than the panther. He has the longest tail in the entire feline family. The colour of his coat varies between off-white to almost snow-white on the under belly during winter and light silver grey or buffish during summer. This seasonal change of colour is nature's way of helping in camouflage and is also noticeable in some other animals like *markhor* and *barhal*. His call is shriller than the panther and resembles the sound of sawing of wood like

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the latter. In stealth and stalking, skill and speed, grace and agility, the beast is unmatched.

A fully grown male measures about eight feet. The tail is almost as long as the body. In a specimen measuring seven feet ten inches the tail was three feet nine inches and the rest of the body only four feet one inch. The coat was also thickest on the tail. The length of the hair was two-and-a quarter inches on the tail, two inches on the body and one to one and-a-half inches on the belly and neck. The legs measured one-and-a half feet. Compared with this, a panther of a similar size and height had a tail two feet long and the coat uniformly half an inch thick. From this, it is evident, that the tail in the snow leopard has a special function. Not only does it help him maintain balance on the precarious ledges where he has to follow his prey, but also acts as a broom to wipe off his own tracks on the the snow. At the place of kill, tracks leading out are always noticeable but those leading in are rarely seen. Bhotias believe that whilst the beast moves to sit up in hiding for the prey, the tail goes on wiping the tracks off.

Mating takes place in February-March and the young are produced in May-June after a gestation period of approximately 14 to 16 weeks. The litter consists of four to five cubs but as per local belief the mother feels so hungry that some of the cubs are devoured by her at birth. The cubs have a much darker and fluffier coat indicating possible migration of the animal from colder but comparatively snowless regions of the north. The cubs are as helpless as human babies at birth. They become fully adult in two to three years and live for about 15 years.

The snow leopard is ever alert and becomes aware of the presence of his prey by picking up faint scents and sounds. His toes are well adapted for stalking on the snow. The hoofed animals produce crunchy sounds but the well-padded and sheathed feet and toes of the snow leopard glide almost without a sound or a dimple in the snow. At the sight or sound of the prey, it freezes and remains as still as a painting till it has decided the strategy of attack. In the final rush, however, all caution is thrown to the winds and the prey is grabbed with lightning speed and a frightening snarl. The big game of antelope family is almost invariably bitten at the lower part of the neck where a gashing wound is created. Soon the victm weakens and slumps.

The snow leopard hardly ever comes near human habitation except during winter when villages are deserted. During periods of intense blizzards, it occasionally takes shelter in the villages. Some of the animals it preys on also enter the deserted villages thus uniting the seeker and the sought. This occurrence, however, facilitates poaching for some deadly nooses are always left in the villages by the Bhotias. In the days gone by a fair amount of skins were traded at the annual fairs.

During summer, the snow leopard moves above the tree line to follow

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the seasonal movements of his prey whereas during winter it moves down with the snow-line. The winter is a time of comparative plenty for him whilst it is summer which is a period of hunger and privations. During winter, the grazing is meagre and shelter of caves and rocks is scarce. The animals concentrate in small areas. The rivers get scanty water and are frozen at the top layer. The hoofed animals actually act as plumbers of animal community by digging out small water holes. The leopard approaches these water holes and lies in wait for a prey.

During winter, another easy prey is the *langur* monkey. Normally the *langur* migrates down with the snowfall and I have actually seen youngsters having great fun chasing each other on the snow in Vyas and Darma. These monkeys normally climb to the safety of trees at night but not so during winters. Fear of blizzards makes them opt for the warmth of caves and rocks. Their howls of panic are heard quite often at night. The snow leopard gets ample chances to get a mouthful and fattens. The rut sets in and ecstatic calls of the animals at love play are heard in February-March.

Then comes summer and the herbivores move to their summer pastures and get scattered over large areas. It is at this time that the litter is delivered. From all accounts, it appears that the mother alone tends the young ones. She has to move large distances to collect food. Cubs get neglected and even lost at times. I came to know of more than one instance when the cubs were picked up by the graziers and security patrols. Their chances of survival are meagre and it is here that the main danger to the snow leopard lies. Food gets scarcer every day and living conditions impossible to cope with.

The musk deer forms a fairly large part of his food but the deer itself is on the verge of extinction. There is no particular value attached to its meat, hide or head. It is a small, unimposing animal with a shaggy coat of brittle hair. The male, however, carries musk in a gland which forms the base for some perfumes and is believed to be an aphrodisiac. The poor animal has been long hunted for highly aromatic musk pod which has a lingering fragrance of a high quality. In the numerous treaties between the victors and the vanquished, musk pods always formed an essential ingredient of tribute. Musk is extensively used in Ayurvedic medicines and is useful in stomach ailments, mental disorder and defects of speech and the eyes. It requires two hundred males to provide about one kilogram of musk. It sells well and hence the massacre. Even though killing is completely banned, a clandestine trade goes on. The main culprits are high-altitude graziers who trap the deer by driving a herd to the desired direction by a ring of fires. I have noticed such tell-tale fires in Uttarakhand in remote parts as Nandanban to the west and Panch Chuli to the east. Thus there is a constant war on the poor creature and unfortunately the odds are heavily against him. The graziers carry something more

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than merely the young kids in their attire. Most of them have a lucrative side-business. Little do they realize that the practice is self-defeating. Soon there would be no musk-deer to trap. Unless more drastic steps are taken and all musk-based industries are banned or supply of musk regulated through government agencies, the future of this animal is indeed most gloomy. It may be worthwhile to establish musk deer farms like some nobles are reported to have done in Tibet.

Other members of the goat family that are preyed on during summer are valued for their meat and heads. *Barhal*, *serow*, *thar* and *goral* fall in this category. The *markhor*, with horns as long as six feet, now mainly adorn the drawing rooms of the West. Due to excessive shooting, this beautiful animal had been shot out of Pir Panjal by 1816 and is now rare in other areas. These animals are more sure-footed on the cliffs than the leopard and are not an easy prey. When the herds were big, the snow leopard had a better chance to prey on them. These animals are also known to employ scouts all around the herd to warn them of impending dangers. In this, they are similar to their American cousin, the pronghorn. In my many encounters with these animals, I have noticed that some healthy males invariably keep a watch on the vulnerable spots whilst the herd grazes. In case of danger, an alarm call is sounded which sends the herd hurtling up to the safety of cliffs where the leopard finds it difficult to follow.

The leopard has to per force live on smaller animals like marmot, lizards, birds and hare. Of these, the marmots themselves employ scouts who give out shrill whistles to order the community back to their burrows. The whistles are lifted by the winds and are carried piercing along the valley echoing and re-echoing. Another animal proving a frugal summer meal is the Himalayan hare that lives above tree-line. This animal lives on the few blades of grass that grow in higher regions. The grass is considered to be rather nutritious but difficult to digest. The rabbits thus pass out the half digested food. Nature however, demands full justice to the scanty food supply and the rabbit quickly eats his own droppings so as to subject them to another cycle of digestion. This recycling of food is noticed in some other members of the wilds as well and is known as pseudo-rumination. However, the hare is a very non-suspecting creature. On approach of the human beings he 'stands and stares' rather than flee. Quite a few of them find their way to the pots of the graziers.

Out of the birds, the snow cock and *monal* are sometimes preyed on. As the covey is approaching a spring or stream to drink water, the leopard pounces on them and kills two or three in one go in the caracal fashion. These beautiful birds, however, are also a delicacy for man and are becoming rare every year.

In Ladakh the leopard has had a comparatively better life so far. In addition to the antelope, he hunts *kyang*, the rare species of wild ass.

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He also occasionally gets a chance to kill a yak which is tackled by team work. Whilst one engages the attention of the beast, another hamstrings him. The crippled beast is then killed. In hunting of the yak, the snow leopard shares the honour as well as technique with mountain wolf. Trapping and killing of the wolf or the leopard in Ladakh is an occasion of a community festivity. The skin of the victim is stuffed and taken out in a procession through the village. Villagers who have lost a goat or yak, move ahead and turn by turn shout vociferous curses on the dead animal. This is the one. "This is the killer who has murdered my yak and goat. Let God's wrath fall on him". As soon as one finishes, another takes over, "This is the one, this is the killer." The body is then put on the roof of a house to ward off evil spirits.

The snow leopard is finding life harder and harder every day. Unfortunately, the scarcity of food hits the nursing mother when the cubs are most vulnerable, weighing the odds against their survival. The chief danger to the snow leopard was at one time form the unsatiable demand for his beautiful fur. In addition, his fat was used for rheumatism, and nails and teeth as charms to ward off evil eye and spirits. The Bhotias caught the beast in strangling traps in which strong electric wires were used. Export of the skins has been banned though a clandestine trade goes on. A heavy punishment to the offenders is necessary. In addition, protection may have to be accorded to animals constituting his food supply. There may not be any other way since no existing zoo can have suitable conditions to preserve the species.

Some of the other types of widely distributed creatures are the charmingly attired butterflies which abound in river valleys normally above 5,000 feet belt right up to the higher meadows.

In Uttarakhand, there are hundreds of miles of good fishing waters. Big *mahseer* abound in almost all big rivers and lakes. Some of the favourite spots are Barkot, Dharasu, Karna Prayag, Rameshwar, Pancheshwar and Ram Ganga Western in the Jim Corbett Park where even a *goonch*, a fresh water mini-shark, may be caught.

Of the areas otherwise rich in wild life, one has to generally reach the valleys between sub-Himalayas and the Great Himalayan Ranges or between the Great Himalayas and the Zaskar Ranges. From the left, area of Bamsaru pass and Chor Gad are rich in *barhal* and one can with luck notice a snow leopard ambling across and stalking his prey. The valley of Bhagirathi beyond Sukhi and the Lakshman Ganga near Bhyunder are particularly rich in black and brown bear. The brown bear is obviously not a very intelligent animal. Pandit Kishen Singh Millamwal relates an eyewitness account of a brown bear digging out the marmots from their burrows. He took them out one by one and went on keeping them under his seat not realizing that in the process of digging, he had to move up thus permitting the captive to escape. The bear is at last left with a

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single miserable *marmot*. A case of last come first served!

The Mandakini valley between Gauri Kund and Kedarnath is rich in all varieties of wild life. The valley of the Pindari near Gwaldam and the Gori near Bagh-Udiyar are rich in most forms of birds and beasts. Panthers still abound in the Raji land but are fast dwindling because of poachers.

We have a long standing tradition of mercy on all living beings. Throughout our history, protection to various members of the animal kingdom has been officially accorded from time to time. The government has already banned shooting of endangered species. It is the duty of all lovers of nature to see that offenders are brought to book. If we want to save our wild life from complete destruction, much greater awareness is the first thing. After all, to save the whooping crane, Canadian government changed the course of a railway line that was likely to pass dangerously close to the nesting ground of the birds. They even closed the area to low flying aircraft! Mere publicity of projects with little or no follow-up action cannot solve the problem. The ban on shooting must go side by side with a ban on felling of trees and clearance of jungles. A forest is not only a source for "shelter and shade, fruit and flower, fodder and fuel" but also a home for the animals. What all do we lose by cruel killing and wasteful destruction!

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Appendices

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Glossary

Ain-i-Akbari: The history of Akbar written by Abul Fazal, the court historian.

Ajota: Non-ploughing day.

Akashvani: A voice from the heavens. It is a common phenomenon in Hindu mythology. An *akashvani* invariably came true.

Am lugara: A garment used by the Bhotias for covering the dead. It is believed to guide the departed soul.

Amrit: Nectar.

Apsara: Celestial dancer of the Court of Indra.

Asan: A small carpet of about 50 cm square.

Ashram: Hermitage of an ascetic.

Ashta bali: Sacrifice of eight different animals.

Ashwamedh Yajna: In ancient India, sovereigns performed horse sacrifice to assert their invincibility. Finest steeds were paraded in the empire and neighbouring states. This meant automatic subjugation of the areas. In case anyone stopped the steeds, the issue was decided by the force of arms. At the end of the ritual, the horses were sacrificed to the deities.

Asura: Demon.

Avatar: Incarnation.

Baoli: Covered spring.

Bhaiya dooj: A Hindu festival when sisters apply *tilak* to their brothers and pray for their good health and long life.

Bhagirath prayatna: Perseverance of the highest order.

Bhasma or *Vibhuti:* The ashes of a fire lit for *puja* or religious ceremonies.

Bhavishya: Future.

Bhil: A wandering tribe.

Bhishma pratijna: Difficult decision.

Bhramar: A flying insect with a deadly sting.

Bhrigu: A saint in Hindu mythology endowed with supernatural powers of forecasting future. Some leaves of the book of prophecies by Bhrigu are still available at some places like Hoshiarpur in Punjab and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh.

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Bhut-pret: Ghosts and goblins.
Bolyan: A type of Punjabi folk song.
Brahma Lok: Heavens.
Vrata: Fast.
Buddhu: Simpleton, idiot.
Chakti: Country liquor.
Charanamrit: The water with which the icon of a deity is washed in Hindu temples.
Chatti: A halting place on a pilgrim route.
Chela: Disciple.
Cheer: Torn portion of sari.
Chhand: A couplet in *Guru Granth Sahib*.
Dakshina: Alms given to a Brahmin.
Damru: The drum carried by Shiva.
Dan: Alms.
Dan: A small size carpet normally two metres by one metre.
Dandi: A basket-like palanquin used to carry two or more men.
Danava or Daitya: Demon.
Darshan: Appearance before a devotee.
Deep jari: A herb emanating light.
Deota: A spirit.
Dera: Applied to Gujjars, a nomadic tribe, dera means a family with bag and baggage. A *dera* is deemed to belong to the oldest surviving male member.
Dera: Residence.
Deva Bhoomi: The land of gods.
Dash pap: Ten wordly sins; stealing, injury to others, adultery, harshness of words, back-biting, untruthfulness, misappropriation, insincerity, cheating and following the wrong path.
Devata: A god.
Dhoop-Agarbatti: Slow-burning incense; pulp and sticks used in temples and Hindu homes for *puja*.
Dharma: Righteousness.
Dharamsala: Inn attached to or patronized by a shrine built for free stay of pilgrims.
Dunga: Stone.
Dwara: Gate.
Ekadashi: The eleventh day.
Fakir: Mendicant.
Gada: A type of mace, used as a weapon in hand-to hand fight.
Gandharva: Celestial singers and musicians.
Gandharva Vivah: A love-marriage.
Ghagra: An embroidered maxi worn by the Rajput ladies.
Godan: Offering of a cow.

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Goli: Maid servant.
Gompa: A Buddhist temple.
Gotra hatya: Murder of one's own blood relations.
Gulal: Colour powder.
Gupta: Hidden.
Gurudwara: A Sikh shrine.
Guru-ka-langar: Free meals at a Sikh shrine.
Gwala: One keeping cows and trading in milk.
Hat: Market.
Havan samagri: Paraphernalia of worship with a sacred fire.
Huniya: An inhabitant of China or Tibet.
Hurka: Drum.
Ishta Devata: One's select deity.
Jal pralaya: The terrible Deluge which swept the Earth thousands of years ago according to the legends in Hindu Scriptures as well as of many other religions of the world. According to the Hindu version, the whole Earth was submerged under the flood and only one person, Manu (Noah in the biblical scripture),saved himself and the *sapta rishi*, the seven wise sages, and various species all in a boat towed by a huge fish, the *Matsya Avatar* of Vishnu.
Jalus: A religious procession.
Jari: A herb.
Jata: The locks of an ascetic.
Jath: A religious procession.
Kalpa Vriksha: A tree that has the divine power to fulfil all desires of a man under its shade.
Kama Dhenu: In Hindu mythology there is a celestial cow endowed with the qualities of fulfilling any desire of the owner.
Kamil: A devotee who has attained true knowledge.
Kanphata jogi: A class of mendicants who pierced their ears to wear large rings. *Kan phata* literally means one with torn ears. The sect was at its zenith from 14th to 19th centuries.
Kandi: A basket made to carry a pilgrim in a sitting position. The basket is carried by one man.
Kankar: Pebble.
Kanya: Daughter.
Kamandalu: A small bucket-like bowl usually carried by Hindu mendicants.
Karua Chauth: A fast observed by Hindu ladies in October. It falls due on the fourth day after the full Moon and is kept for the well-being of the husbands. Breakfast is taken before setting of the stars. The day is spent without food or water. The fast is broken at Moon rise. The ordeal lasts about 17 hours.
Kashi: Old name of Varanasi.
Kavi darbar: A poetic symposium.

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Keta: Boy.
Keti: Girl.
Khadaga: A broad scimitar-type sword.
Khampas: The robber bands of Tibet.
Khoncha: A long stirring spoon used by sweet-makers.
Kubera: The Hindu god of hoarded wealth.
Kubera Bhandar: The amassed wealth of *Kuber*.
Kutiya: A small hut.
Lanka Dwip: Sri Lanka.
Laksha grih: A House of lac. The *Mahabharata* has that Duryodhana built a house of lac to immolate the Pandavas.
Mahadeva: Shiva, the supreme deity.
Mahamari: A plague that killed hundreds in Uttarakhand in the nineteenth century. It was considered a wrath of the gods for non-observance of religious ceremonies.
Mahant: Head of a religious sect.
Mali: A gardener.
Malla: Upper.
Mani: A type of precious stone emanating light.
Mata: Mother.
Math: A monastery.
Months of Hindu Calendar: Chaitra or Chait, Baisakh, Jyeshth, Asarh Savan or Shrawan, Bhadon, Asuj, Kartik, Maghram, Pousa Magh, Phagun. Chaitra corresponds with mid March to mid April. Days in a month are not constant. Slight variations work in such a way that even after millions of years, Chaitra would be a spring month. It is not so in other calendars.
Mrityulok: The mortal world.
Mukti or *Moksha*: Salvation. Ever-lasting peace and bliss. Deliverance from the cycle of constant birth and death.
Mundan: Ceremonial cutting of hair of a male Hindu child. The ceremony is normally performed when the child is two years old.
Murti: The idol.
Nag: A cobra snake.
Nai bahu: Newly-wed daughter-in-law.
Namaskar: Greetings.
Namaz: Muslim prayers.
Names of Lord Krishna: Girdhar, Gopal, Kanhaiya, Mohan, Murlidhar, Shyam.
Names of Shiva: Bholenath, Har, Mahadeva, Shankar, Shiva, Umapati, Kedarnath, Sadashiv, Mahesh.
Namah: I bow to thee.
Narada: A saint in Hindu mythology whose main occupation is to perpetrate and perpetuate misunderstandings.

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Nava Grah: Nine stars/constellations.
Nava Ratna: Nine precious stones.
Nayaka: Mistress.
Nayan: Eyes.
Pahari: Resident of the hills.
Parvat: Mountain.
Pashu: Animal.
Pakshiraj: King of the birds. The title is normally given to the royal swan.
Panch Parmeshwar: Five of the most important gods of Hindu religion; Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, Mahesh the destroyer, Shakti the goddess of energy, and Ganesh the god of peace and plenty.
Pankhi: Ladies' shawls of an inferior variety.
Pradhan: Village head-man.
Prasad: Eatables given by or blessed by god. In all Hindu shrines, some eatables are distributed to the devotees after *puja*. This is called *prasad.*
Pravesh: Approach to or entry in an area.
Prayag: Confluence of rivers.
Prithvi: Earth.
Puja: Worship.
Pujari: Priest.
Puri: Fried chapati.
Purnima: Full Moon.
Purohit: Priest.
Pushpa Bas: The valley of flowers.
Quarter-Guard: A well-guarded building where arms, ammunition and treasury of a unit are kept.
Rag-Ragini: Musical compositions.
Rajmata: Queen mother.
Rakshas: A demon.
Rani: Queen—Also an endearing way of addressing the beloved.
Sabha: Meeting.
Sadavrata: A general feast for the poor and hungry.
Sadh-sangat: A gathering of devotees at a Sikh shrine. A holy congergation.
Samadhi: Meditation.
Sangarh: Stone wall enclosure without a roof.
Sanjivani buti: The life-reviving herb. There is a popular belief that in the Himalayas, there is a herb that can revive life in a dying man.
Sanyasi: One who has renounced the world.
Sapta Rishi: Seven wise sages who were created by Brahma, and to whom wisdom of the *Vedas* was revealed. These sages play an important part in Hindu mythology. They were fixed in the skies by Shiva where

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they remain to date as constellation Ursa Major.

Sati: Self-immolation by a widow. In ancient India, the widows used to burn themselves along with the husbands. The custom was stopped by Akbar but persists in remote parts of Rajasthan.

Satnam: The true name; God.

Shaheed: A martyr.

Shaiya: Bed.

Shakya Muni: Gautama Buddha.

Shani: Saturn.

Sheesh Mahal: A palace made of glass.

Shila: Stone.

Shila lekh: Engraved writting on a stone.

Shradh: Feeding of Brahmins and holy men for appeasement of the departed souls.

Shap: Curse.

Shri Guru Granth Sahib: The religious book of the Sikhs.

Siddh Pith: A shrine where wishes come true.

Sikandar: Alexander.

Sindh: River Indus.

Sinhasan: Stone.

Sanatan Dharma: The ancient Hindu faith.

Srishti: The universe.

Srishti rachna: Creation of the universe.

Sudarshan Chakra: A circular weapon of Krishna (Vishnu). The weapon would wreak destruction in the enemy lines and then return back to the wielder like a boomerang.

Surya: The sun.

Swarna: Gold.

Swayamvar: In ancient India, a girl could choose her own husband. The suitors would come from far and wide. The girl announced her decision by presenting a garland to the selected man.

Takhat: Throne.

Tal: A small lake.

Talla: Lower.

Tandava Nritya: Dance of Shiva.

Tapta Kund: A pond of hot water.

Tatiri: Seagull.

Thara: A raised platform.

Thulma: A coarse blanket.

Tilak: A colour mark applied in the centre of the forehead.

Tilmani: A measuring utensil in Uttarakhand. A simile with *tilmani* conveys the sense of beauty coupled with utility.

Trilok: The three words of Hindu mythology, *Swarg* or Heaven, *Prithvi* or the Earth, and *Patal*, the under world of the demons.

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Triveni Sangam: Prayag, the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and the subterranean Saraswati.
Usha: Dawn. Rays of the morning sun.
Vahana: Mount.
Vahi: Record book.
Vaid: Doctor.
Vasi: Nivasi: Dweller.
Vayu: The ruling deity of the winds.
Vedas: The four religious books of the Aryans! *Rig*, *Sam*, *Yajur and Atharva*.
Vilap: Heart-rending cries of a lady in distress.
Vijaya Yatra: Victory march.
Yakcha: Demon.
Yatra: Travel to a holy shrine.
Yatra Marg: Pilgrim route.

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Index

A

Abhay Chand, Raja 103
Abi Gamin peak 14
Abul Fazal 120
Adhikari, Shivnath 90
Afghanistan 24, 74
Africa 10
Agni, the god of fire 157
Agra 51
Agricultural Research, Indian Council of 97
Aibak, Qutub-ud-Din 51
Airavat, Lord Indra's elephant 4
Ajai Pal 25
Ajaypal, Raja 84
Akash Ganga 152
Akashvani 4, 109, 156
Akbar, Emperor 51, 75, 121
Alaknanda 26
Alberuni 7
Alexandar the Great 118, 247
Almora 13, 14, 24, 25, 33, 38, 39, 93, 96, 97, 99, 101, 106
Almora ridge 99
Amarnath cave 240
Ambala 85
Ameer Singh, Kajee 148
Amesbury 95
Amrit, the elixir of life 4, 8
Anaryakot 101
Andhra Pradesh 35
Anek Malla, king of Nepal 152
Anglo-Nepalese Treaty 26
Ansumat, grandson of Sagar 119
Antarctica 10
Anwal 32
Api (Nepal) 97, 99, 106, 237
Apsaras 67, 128
Arjuna 80, 110
Army School of Work Studies 77
Arthashastra 240
Arunachal Pradesh 29, 134
Arya Samaj 28
Aryanas 12, 29, 37, 45, 94
Ashoka edict 73, 77, 78
Ashoka the Great 45
Ashvamedha Yajna 119
Asia 10
Askot 44
Asmajas, son of Raja Sagar 119
Assam 141
Astronomical Observatory, Government 95
Atkinson, E.I. 29, 45
Atlantis, the lost island 5, 112
Aurangzeb, Emperor 72, 73, 176, 216
Australia 10

B

Badrika Ashram 154, 155
Badrinath peak 16, 18, 20, 22, 86, 99, 112, 137, 139, 142, 203, 208
Bagheshwar 17, 18, 24, 58
Bahadur, Khan 91
Bahruz, Raja 72
Baijnath 24
Bairagi, Banda Bahadur 175
Bakshi, Anand 42
Balichand Devata 47
Balaram 109

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INDEX

Bampa Nag Devata 33
Banbassa 102
Bander Poonch peak 13, 14, 15, 16, 32, 77, 86, 112, 114, 116, 177, 125, 127, 129, 197
Bangladesh 10, 11, 21
Barahat 59
Barohoti plain 17, 18, 25
Baram village 17, 42
Bareilly 73, 102
Barisal (Bangladesh) 11
Barkot 77, 114, 123
Barmer 31
Barron 94
Battle of Panipat, the first 75
Battle of Plassey 75
Bay of Bengal 11, 119
Baz Bahadur, Raja 25, 38, 90, 95, 99
Bhabu dam 99
Bhagnath devata 47
Bhagirathi sisters 15, 134, 135, 204
Bhagirathi valley 115, 116
Bhagwat Puran, Shrimad 155
Bhagawad Gita 160, 239
Bhairon Chatti 145
Bhakra dam 9
Bharat 46
Bharat Kunte peak 15, 112, 204
Bharti Chand, Raja 25, 39, 92
Bhaskar Prayag 125
Bhatinda 18
Bhatwari 125, 145
Bhim 21, 23, 103, 140
Bhimeshwar 95
Bhim Goda 90
Bhim Nagar 21
Bhishma Pitamah 131
Bhojpatra 128, 134
Bhot 51
Bhotia (*see* Tribes)
Bhowali 97
Bhuj Bas 135, 136
Bir Dev 24
Birla, G.D. 129
Bir Singh 51
Bishal, Raja 144
Bod (old name of Tibet) 23
Brahma, Lord 3, 44, 45, 93, 94, 110, 119, 121
Brahmadasi 38
Brahmapura 24
Brahma Puran 118
Buddhism 39
Burman, R.D. 42
bridge over Ganga, first steel suspension 129

C

Callaghan, 129
Campbell 45
Campbell, D. (Dy. Commissioner of Pauri Garhwal) 85
Castes (*see* Tribes)
Central Asian Plateau 6
Chakrata 14, 22, 76, 77, 114
Chamba 83, 112
Chamoli 13, 19
Champavat 14, 22, 23, 24, 40, 103, 105
Chanakya 240
Chandan Charkha 52
Chandi Devi, legend of 151
Chandra or Chandrama (the moon) 4
Changabanga peak 15
Charak, founder of known Ayurvedic system, 131
Charbata (Bangladesh) 11
Charjabbar (Bangladesh) 11
Charkalama (Bangladesh) 11
Charmasjid (Bangladesh) 11
Chukhamba 74, 106, 142
Chaukhamba peak 15, 99
Cheena peak 93, 94
Cheerbas 15
China 10, 23, 226
China Sea 10
Chinese flag 87
Chipalkot jungles 43
Chishul 204
Clement, Father 74
Clement Town 74
Communities (*see* Tribes)
Coomaraswamy, Anand 4
Cooper, H. 28
Corbett, Jim 89, 103, 141
Crooke, W. 45

D

Daba (Tibet) 25
Daksha, Prajapati (the mythological king) 94
Dalton, nuclear scientist 5
Damru of Lord Shiva 38
Dara Shikoh 73

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INDEX

Darma 17, 19, 29, 41, 53
Deb Singh 51
Dehra Dun 13, 15, 25, 30, 71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 83, 113, 156
Delhi 71, 89, 91
Deluge, the (*see Jal Pralaya*)
Demons—
—Angadesh 23
—Bali 142
—Bana 105, 142, 143
—Ghatotkach 21, 23
—Hiranyaksh 3, 5, 156
—Hirimba (or Hurma, Hudimbi) 21
—Jalandhar 3, 5, 128
—Kalyawan 163
—Mahishasur 144, 223
—Prahlad 142
—Raktavijaya 155
—Sahasrakancha 155
—Tandec 21
Deoputta 23
Devadasi 38, 39
Devas and Dananas, the mythological war between 8,22
Dev Prayag 29, 83, 111, 112, 119, 121
Devaki 109
Devidhura 52
Dias, Maj. John 16
Didihat 54
Dhakori plain 35
Dharasu 113, 123, 147
Dharchula 18, 48, 54
Dhauladhar range 13, 14, 126
Dharam Dutt of Kanjeewaram, Prince 140
Dhruva 110
Dogadda 85
Domana village 29
Doon School 74
Doonvalley 15, 19, 25, 71, 73, 74, 76
Doti 39
Dronacharya, the guru of Pandavas, 80, 90
Dropadi 126, 162
Dropadi-ka-danda 125, 126, 140
Drona Giri 3, 86
Dudatoli plain 35
Dula Salu of Barahat, Raja 58
Dunagiri forest 21
Dunagiri peak 15
Duryadhan 72, 79, 139
Dushyanta, the legendry Raja mentioned in Kalidasa's play *Shakuntala*, 21
Dwarahat 22, 24, 30, 59, 96

E

East India Company 26, 74, 75
Englishman (Calcutta), the 94
Eocene period 10
Equator 10
Etkinson, Edward T. 40, 47, 150
Everest, Col. George Richard 74, 76
Everest, Mt. 6, 74

F

Fairs—
—Bagheshwar fair 40, 52
—Devidhura fair 52
—Gauchar fair 40, 52
—Gopeshwar fair 52
=Jaulibi fair 40, 52
—Jiti Bhadwar fair 33
—Thal fair 40, 25
—Uttarkashy fair 52
Fair Act of 1938, the U.P. 52
Fateh Shah, Raja 25
Fatehwal 10
Ferozepur 18
Forest Research Institute 72
Frazer 26
Free meals to pilgrims of Kedarnath, system of 26

G

Gandhi, Mahatma 99
Ganesh, Sarkata 146
Ganesh Parvat 15, 16
Ganesh Prayag 112
Ganga Avataran, legend of 118-22
Gangnani 20, 114, 123
Gangotri peaks 15, 83, 111,112, 113, 114
Gurgacharaya 109
Garhwal 13, 24, 25, 26, 113, 139, 149
Garhwal Regiment 85
Garhwal Rifles Officers Mess 87
garudobasavi 38
Gaumukh spring 116, 121, 133, 136, 137, 202, 203
Gee, E.P. 43
German flag 87
Ghamsali devata 33
Ghantakaran 33

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INDEX

Ghatak devata 23
Ghori Parvat 15, 97
Gita 110
Glaciers—
—Abi Gamin 16
—Badrinath 121
– Bhagirathi 16, 17, 121, 164, 200
—Chaturangi 17, 204, 206, 208
—Gangotri 16, 17, 20, 21, 137, 164
—Kamet 16
—Mana 16
—Milam 17, 18, 22, 232
—Nilambar 17
—Pilapani 17
—Raktavarna 17, 203, 204
—Satopanth 16, 121, 206
—Sita 208
—Suryalaya 9
—Swet Varna 17
—Vasuki 205
—Yamunotri 16, 17, 20, 22, 117
Gokul 109, 110
Gol Ghantal brothers 59
Gole devata (*also* goll *or* gorill) 100, 103, 104, 105
Gondawanaland 10
Goraknath, Guru 25
Gorichhal 17, 18, 19, 31, 42, 74
Gorkhas, the 25, 26, 30, 35, 55, 74, 155, 177
Gotra hatya 140
Govind Ghat 16
Govisana 90
Great Himalayan Range, the 14, 16, 17, 20, 32
Greece 5
Guam island 6
Guatemala 5
Guru Baba Ram Rai 72, 73
Guru Shri Har Rai 72
Guru Shri Har Kishan 72
Guru Shri Nanak Dev 75
Guru Shri Teg Bahadur 72
Gurudwaras—
—Anandpur Sahib 176
—Darbar Sahib (of Udasi Sikhs) 177, 184-185
—Gobind Dham or Gagaria 180-181
—Hemkunt Sahib 175-182
—Paonta Sahib 175-177
—Ritha Sahib 105-106, 179, 182-184
Gurukul Kangri 82
Gyan Chand, Raja of Kumaon 24, 25
Gyanima Mandi 51

H

Hanskoop and Kramer 115
Haldwani 40, 91, 92, 106
Hanuman 3, 4, 22, 114
Hanuman Chatti 16, 111, 114, 115
Hanuman peak 15
Hardwar (*also* Haridwar) 14, 24, 71, 83 114
Hargiri, Sadhu 51
Harrer (German p-o-w author of *Seven Years in Tibet*) 115
Harsil 89, 116, 127
Haruwa Kaira 59
Haryana 21
Hastings, Warren 40
Hearsy, Hyder Jung 51, 73, 74
Himachal Pradesh 9, 11, 13, 14, 30
Himalayas, the 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 22, 43, 94, 140
Hindukush 8, 28, 37
Holi 31
Huen Tasang 23, 24, 73,
Hugel, Baron 39
Hume, Col. R. 79
Hun Desh 59
Huniya, Raja Chand Vikhey Pal 59

I

Indian National Congress 75
Indo-Gangetic Plains 7, 8
Indo-German Association 22
Indra, the god of clouds 4, 67
Indra Chand, Raja 55
Iran 7, 51

J

Jagdev Singh 31
Jaimal 31
Jalandhari God 5
Jal Devi 47
Jal Pralaya 5, 45
Jameson, Dr. 74
Janmejaya 147
Jaulijibi 17, 18, 52
Jaunsar Bawar 79
Jehangir 51
Jodhpur 31

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Johar 23, 52, 53, 59
Jones, William 158
Joshi, Harsh Dev 26
Joshinath 16, 24, 39, 158, 159
Jyotirnath near Badrinath 147

K

Kabul 29
Kailash Range, the 14, 15, 25, 97, 127
Kailash Ashram 83
Kalanga Garrison 26
Kalanga hill 74
Kalanka peak 15
Kala Pani 22
Kalichhal 18, 19
Kalidas 13, 134
Kali Kumaon 29, 39
Kalimath 151
Kalimath ridge 99
Kalindi Parvat 114
Kalika Puran 143
Kalinjar 39
Kalinjuga 111, 124
Kalkot 77
Kalpa Vriksha 158
Kalsi 73, 76, 77, 78
Kaludanda 85
Kalyan Chand, Raja 25, 99
Kamadhenu 122, 140
Kamasutra 38
Kamet peak 14, 15
Kanali Cheinna 59
Kangra, capture of 131
Kansa 109
Karakoram (Krishna Giri) 8, 9, 14
Karchha Kund peak 15
Kargil 7
Karkoktak, Nagdevata 94
Karna 22, 23, 157
Karna Prayag 17
Karua Chauth fast 55
Kashipur 90
Kashmir (also Jammu & Kashmir) 14
Katarmal 96
Kaulagarh 74
Kauravas, the 21, 22, 23, 72, 79
Kausani 14, 17
Kedar Khand 13, 139
Kedar peak (near Pune) 140
Kedarnath peak 20, 77, 86, 112, 113, 139
Keo Gad 19
Keshav Prayag 33
Khadas 32
Khampas (see Tribes)
Kharsali 115, 116, 117, 123
Khudai devata 47
Khurbura 72
Khurkata 72
Khilji, Sultan Allau-Din 75
Kinner Kailash 128
Kirti Chand, Raja 40
Kiritnagar 84
Kooduturai 83
Kotdwar 85
Kot Kangra 21, 26, 29
Kot Mahadeva 84
Krishna, Lord 33, 105, 109 110, 141, 142
Kulu 21
Kumaon 13, 22, 24, 25
Kumaon Regiment 98
Kumbhkarna 22, 23
Kunti 22
Kush 84
Kuthi 11, 22
Kuttor 24

L

Ladakh 7, 8, 11, 14
Ladakh Range, 14
Lakes—
—Amrit Kund 149
—Bank Kund 20, 33
—Bhim Tal 19, 93, 94, 95, 96
—Brahma Kund 132, 145
—Chhota Mansarovar 20, 238
—Chipalkot 47
—Chorabari Tal 20, 149
—Deoria Tal 19, 151
—Devi Tal 20
—Dhondi Tal 19, 125
—Ganganayan Kund 114
—Ganga Pani 232
—Gauri Kund 20, 116, 132, 146, 147, 254
—Gohna 19, 211
—Hamsa Kund 149
—Karnakul Kagbhusandi 19, 193
—Khurpa Tal 19
—Lok Pal 20, 33
—Malwa Tal 19, 96
—Mansarovar 94
—Naini Tal 19, 93
—Narad Kund 156, 157
—Narayan Tal 94

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INDEX

—Naukhuchia Tal 19, 93, 96
—Pari Talab 20, 128
—Renuka Tal 175
—Retas Kund 149
—Rishi Kund 83, 125
—Rudra Kund 145
—Rup Kund 19, 224, 227
—Sat Tal 19, 93, 96
—Satyapha Tal 20, 33, 164
—Shangas Kund 233
—Sumna 19
—Surya Kund 116, 157, 232
—Tapas Kunds 156
—Tri-Rishi Sarowar 94
—Uddak Kund 149
—Vasuki Tal 19-20, 149, 205
—Vishnu Kund 145
Lakhanpur 96
Lakshman 3, 21, 84
Lakshmiban 133
Lampak peak 15
Landour 76
Landslide of 1880 95
Lanka Dweep 3
Lansdowne 14, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89
Lansdowne, Lord 86
Lapthal bowl 11, 16
Laria Kanta 93
Lav 84
Lawrence 76
Laxman plain, the 17, 36
Leh 7
Le Pichon, Xavier 10
Lingabasavi 38
Linga Purana 140
Lingard, Dr. Alfred 97
Lohaghat 106
Lohsar 32
Lolughat 22

M

MacNamara, F. N. 7
Madagaskar 10
Mahabharata, the 4, 21, 22, 24, 80, 105, 122, 126, 139, 140, 143, 155, 156, 161, 162
Mahabharata Ranga, the 21
Mahadeva (see Shiva)
Mahapanth 148
Mahasu 13, 32
Mahasu devata 79
Mahesh Yogi 83
Mahmud of Ghazni 39
Maikoli peak 15
Malikarjan devata 47
Malu Sahi and Rajula, legend of 41, 42, 58-60
Malwa-ka-pair 96
Mana peak 16, 32, 33, 86
Manali 21
Maninag Parvat 162
Man Shah Raja 25
Madal Chatti 152
Mandara Parvat 4
Man-eater of Champavat 103
Man-eater of Rudra Prayag 141
Manenath devata 47
Mangolia 187
Manibhadra Ashram 154
Manu 44, 45, 110
Manusmriti 162
Mariana Trench 6
Markandaya Purana 18, 115
Matri peak 15
Matsy avatar 5, 42
Matsya Puran 155
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (U.S.A.) 10
Mayapur, 24
Mayapuri, Sadhu 51
McCrae, John 98
Mediterranean Ocean 10
Meerut 13, 71, 72
Meghanad 82
Meghbhasan (Bangladesh) 11
Menaka Parvat 4,5
Meru Parvat, a legendry mountain 3
Mexico 5
Military Academy, Indian 75
Mold Ram 68
Monserrate, Father (Spanish missionary in Akbar's court) 121
Monsoon 76
Moorcroft, William 51
Moradabad 89, 102
Morgan, W.J. 10
Moti Ram Shah 94
Mountaineering, Nehru Institute of 125
Mo-Y-Lo 80
Muir 37
Mukteshwar 14, 90, 97
Munshi, K.M. 148
Murray, Birg. Gen. 85

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Mushtar, Hussain Khan of Rampur, Ustad 91
Muslims 30
Mussoori 75, 76, 77, 83, 112, 113, 114, 115
Mussoori Lansdowne 14

N

Nagaland 21
Nag Tibba Range, the 14, 15, 18, 71
Nainital 13, 93, 94
Nal Chatti 143, 150
Nal-Damyanti, legend of 96, 143
Nand 110
Nanda Devi 20, 38, 47
Nanda Devi peak 15, 16, 17, 20, 32, 45, 77, 86, 97, 99, 112, 220, 231
Nanda Devi Sanctuary 225, 244, 249
Nandi Ghunthi peak 15, 224, 225
Nanda Khat peak 15, 225
Nanda Kot peak 15, 86, 97, 220, 225
Nandanban plain 17, 36
Nandakana 97
Nand Prayag 16
Narad 141
Nar-Narayan 154-155
Narad Puran 155
Narendra Nagar 77, 83, 111, 112, 113
Narender Shah, Raja of Tehri 111
Narbari, Swami 135
Narasimha avatar 158, 159
National Aeronautics & Space Administration (U.S.A.) 11
Nanga Parvat 14
Neelkantha peak 4, 5, 15, 86, 165
Nayakana 40
Neilla 10
Nepal 8, 11, 14, 21, 30, 40, 45, 53, 102, 105, 130, 140, 150
Nepalese war 1814-15 26
Neune Chappelle, battle of 87
Nilgris, the 21
Nishad 44
Noah's Arc 5
Nurpur 51

O

Oakley, E. S. 26
Okhimath 151

P

Pachuwa Doral 59
Pacific Ocean 10
Padma Purana 38, 80
Pakistan 21
Palamsumda 11
Panchal Desh 22
Panch Chuli peaks, the 15, 17, 20, 22, 41, 43, 99, 103, 106, 230, 251
Pancheshwar 17
Panch Pawa god 33
Panch Shila 160
Panadavas, the 21, 22, 23, 72, 79, 103, 132, 140, 148
Pandit Vijaya Lakshmi 76
Pandu, Raja 22
Padukeshwar 22
Pant University of Agriculture & Technology, Govind Ballabh 91
Park, Jim Corbett National 85, 89 90
Parmarath Ashram 82
Pashmina 50, 53, 54
Passes—
—Bumser (Bamsam khal) 115
—Jhandi Dhura 11
—Kalindi Khal 135
—Kungribingrila 9, 11, 16, 23, 25
—Lamkhuga 128
—Lipulekh 11, 51
—Lumpiya Dhura 9
—Luwe Dhura 11, 17
—Mana 11
—Milam 51
—Mohan 71, 72
—Mulingla 9
—Niti 11, 51, 71, 72
—Nuwe Dhura 11, 17
—Prangla 11
—Thagla 9
—Unta Dhura 11
Patel, Sardar Vallabhbhai 113
Patna 51
Pauri 13, 85, 86
Pauri Garhwal 26
Persia 50, 51
Pesharwar, rulers of 30
Phalera Baba 148
Phungar village 23
Phalkari village 84
Pilibhit 102
Pinjore 21

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Pir Panjal Range, the 14
Pirthi Shah, Raja 72, 73
Pithoragarh 13, 14, 106
Plate Testonic theory 10
Plato 5
Pradyumna Shah, Raja 25
Pratap Shah, Raja 25
Prithu, Raja 44
Purunas, the 13
Pushpa Bas 134

Q

Qutub Minar 15

R

Radha 110
Raghunandan Das of Moradabad Seth 133
Rajatarangini 38
Rajpur 76, 99
Rajputs—
—Agnikul 30
—Chauhan 30
—Parihar 30
—Solanki 30
Rajramba peak 15
Ram 21, 22, 31, 83, 84
Ram Ganga Dam 90
Ram Rai, Baba 72, 73, 176, 184
Ramanna, Raja 4
Ramayana, 4, 15, 22, 24
Rameshwar 17, 106
Ranikhet 14
Ranjati Range 14
Raper, A.R. 81, 121
Rataban peak 14, 15, 16
Ravana 3, 31, 82, 84
Ray, Shona 98
Razia Sultana 75
Renuka, wife of Rishi Jamadagni, 38
Renuka's affair with Krtavirya 124
Rigveda 162
Rishis—
—Agastya 141, 142, 150
—Anga 44
—Atri 44. 94
—Bhrigu 119, 165
—Jagadamani 38
—Jahnu 120
—Kalpi 175, 176
—Kanad 5
—Kanwa 158
—Kapil 119
—Madhakata 32, 178
—Mahabir 122
—Markandaya 115
—Pulaha 04
—Pulastya 94
—Rudraksha 3, 6
—Satapa Brahma 93
—Vashishtha 122
—Ved Vyas 13
—Vena 44
—Vyas 22, 34, 140, 175, 235
Rishikesh 30, 31, 72, 76, 83, 111, 113
Rivers—
—Alkananda 15, 16, 55, 72, 84, 112, 119, 121, 141
—Amudha nadi 83
—Amrit Ganga 16
—Arun Koshi 11
—Ashi 124, 125
—Bhagirathi 15, 16, 17, 55, 112, 119, 121, 136
—Bhakra 17
—Bhavani 83
—Bhilangana 40, 112
—Birehi Ganga 16, 19
—Brahmaputra 9, 14, 119
—Chenab 18
—Cauvery 83
—Dabak 17
—Dharam Ganga 15, 16, 71, 143
—Dhauli Ganga 11, 15, 16, 71-2
—Dudh Ganga 16
—Dudh Koshi 11
—Ganesh Ganga 16
—Ganga 9, 71, 83, 117, 118, 119, 121
—Garur Ganga 16
—Girthi Ganga 16
—Gomati 16, 17, 58
—Gori Ganga 15, 16, 17, 43 104, 128
—Gupta Saraswati 83
—Hanuman Ganga 111
—Hari Ganga 128
—Indo-Brahm 9, 10, 83
—Indus 9
—Jadh Ganga 15
—Kalindi 117
—Kio Gad 16
—Kishi Ganga 16
—Koh 17
—Kosi 16, 17
—Lakshman Ganga 16
—Mahakali 13, 16, 17, 22, 26, 39, 105

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—Mandakini 17, 141
—Moti Ganga 17
—Nandakini 16
—Nandhur 17
—Nihar 17
—Nil Ganta 115, 128
—Patal Ganga 16
—Pindari 16, 17
—Ram Ganga Eastern 16, 17, 30, 106
—Ram Ganga Western 16, 17
—Raspana 74
—Rishi Ganga I 16, 45
—Rishi Ganga II 16
—Saraswati 11, 16, 22
—Saryu 16, 17, 21, 58, 106
—Saryu Ganga 105
—Sharda 103
—Shivalik 9
—Sind 118
—Song 17
—Sutlej 14, 18
—Swal 100
—Tons 13
—Triveni 83
—Varma 124
—Vishnu Ganga 16, 121, 137
—Yamuna 13, 15, 16, 55, 71, 83, 110, 111, 115, 116, 117
—Yong Gad 16
Rohilkhand 91
Rohilla 30
Rohilla, Ghulam Kader 73
Rohilla, Mohammad Khan 25
Rohilla, Najibud-Daulab 73
Roorkee 9, 71, 72
Roy, D.L. 4
Rudra Chand, Raja 99
Rudra Prayag 17, 141
Rupati, mythological king 23

S

Saeen Dina 78
Saeen Lakh Data 30
Sagar, Raja 119
Sagauli 26
Sahara, desert 6
Saharanpur 71, 73
Sahasradhar waterfall 75, 132
Sanctuaries—
—*abhaya aranyas* 240
—Corbett National Park 244-248
—Nand Devi Rishi or Ganga Sanctuary 244-249
—Rajaji Sanctuary 244-249
—Tons or Gobind Ballabh Pant Sanctuary 244-247
Sangchomla 11
Sanjana, daughter of Vishwakarma 10
Sanjivani buti 114, 186, 212
Sapta Rishi 5, 16
Saptarishi Ashram 82
Sarasati Devi 147
Sarda math of Dwarka 147
Satpura Range 10
Sea of Allience (on Moon) 9
Sea of Tethys 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 73, 93, 214-220
Sex strike of wives 52
Shahjahan, Emperor 51, 248
Shakti, Goddess 101
Shakuntala 21, 159
Shakya Muni 32
Shani Prayag 115
Shankaracharya, Adi 84, 131, 148, 158
Shankar Dass Sohan Lal of Dogadda 86
Sharma, Maj. Som Nath 98
Shiva, Lord 3, 4, 5, 12, 18, 20, 28, 38, 47, 67, 84, 93, 101, 118, 122, 139, 152, 164, 184, 199, 224
Shivaji, Chhatrapati 75
Shivalik Range, the 14, 15, 17, 25, 31, 71, 73, 77, 111
Shivanathpur 90
Shivet, Raja 81
Shivling peak, 15, 134, 136
Shore, F.J., 76
Shrikantha peak 15, 22, 77, 112
Shrimad Bhagwad 139
Siahai Devi peak 100
Sikkim 24, 25
Simla 11, 77
Simtola Ridge 99, 100
Sind 18
Singhote 123
Sirkhanda Devi peak 77
Sinmor, Raja of 73
Sita 21, 84
Sivananda Ashram 83
Skand Purana 38, 80, 103, 118, 124, 146, 155
Smarangana Sutradhar (a Sanskrit treatise on aircraft construction technique) 4

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INDEX

Someshwar 59
Son Prayag 146
Sonpati Bhotia of Johar, Raja 58
South Africa 10
South America 10
Spiti 11
Srinagar 25, 39, 74, 83, 84, 85, 113, 124
Srinagar Math of Mysore 147
Sudarshan Chakra 12, 144
Sudershan Shah, Raja 26, 73, 74
Sukhi 115
Suleman Shikoh 73
Sultana, Razia 75
Suraj Mal Mahendar Prasad of Lansdowne 86
Suri, Sher Shah 39
Surya 22, 110
Strachey, W. 46
Swarga Ashram 83
Swarga Rohini 22, 164, 165, 204
Suria 97

T

Tagore, Rabindranath 58
Taj Mahal 75
Taklakhar fort 25
Talakot 51
Tanakpur 102
Tamdav 5
Tapoban plain 17
Taran Singh 31
Tawa Ghat
Teesta 29
Testonic earthquakes, the 9
Tehri 77, 83, 84, 113
Tehri Garhwal 14, 26
Temples—
—Amarnath 152
—Badrinath 83, 112, 113, 159
—Baleshwar 103, 139
—Bagheshwar 52, 139
—Baghnath 58
—Bhagwati Durga 112
—Bhairon 129
—Bholanath 101
—Bireshwar 101
—Brahini 101
—Devi 83
—Gangotri 26, 117, 120, 121
—Ghatak or Ghatokach 103
—Gopeshwar 52, 148
—Gorakhnath 82
—Hansi 79
—Hanuman Mandir 82
—Jageshwar 90, 139
—Jwalamukhi 39, 90
—Jyotirlingas 147
—Kali 112
—Kalpeshwar 140, 152
—Kamleshwar Mahadeva 84, 86
—Kedarnath 83, 112, 113, 121, 141, 147
—Laxmi Naryan 112, 128
—Madhayameshwar 140, 151
—Muketshwar 139
—Narbadeshwar 112
—Neeleshwar 82
—Omkareshwar 150
—Panch Badri 159
—Panch Kedar 139, 140
—Pashupatinath Mahadeva 82
—Punyagiri 102
—Pushkar 83
—Raghunathji 83, 112
—Rudranath 140
—Sateshwar 112
—Shani 115
—Shatrughna 83
—Shitla 112
—Someshwar 59
—Sri Ayappa 82
—Sukh-ka-Mandir 124
—Tungnath 140
—Uttarkashy 52
—Villawakeshwar 82
Temur Lane 34, 75
Terai 13, 17, 18, 29, 31, 50, 93, 102
Tertiary Age 6, 10
Thapa, Amar Singh 26, 130, 131
Thapa, Balbahadur Singh 74
Thapa, Nain Singh 131
Thar desert 6, 46
Thimayya Corner museum 97
Tibet 8, 23, 25, 29, 40, 115, 116, 129
—Chinese occupation of 50
Tibetan script 23, 24
Tichy, Herbert 135
Tinkar 11
Tirsuli 17
Traill, Sir George William 26, 34, 39, 45, 46, 93, 148
Tribes
—*Banjaras* 73
—*Ban Rawats* 43

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INDEX

—*Bhils* 112
—*Bhoksas* 18, 29, 31
—*Bhotias* 18, 19, 32, 34, 35, 40, 47, 53, 127, 164, 211, 231, 235, 253
—*Brahmi* 45, 46
—*Chowdhries* 29, 30
—*Doms* 28, 37, 45, 101
—*Dhamis* 40
—*Gujjars* 18, 20, 31, 73
—*Gaddis* 19, 35
—*Hurkiyas* 28, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 58, 67, 160
—*Kafirs* (of Chitral) 46
—*Kamboja* 24
—*Khampas* 33, 41, 51
—*Khonde* Reddy 35
—*Khasa* or *Khasia* 24, 29, 35, 37, 46
—*Kirats* 29, 37, 45
—*Limbus* 45, 46
—*Nagas* 24, 29, 35, 37
—*Rajis* 18, 31, 40, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48
—*Sakas* 24
—*Tharus* 18, 29, 31
—*Yavanas* 24
Trimukhi Parvat 15
Trishul peak 15, 86, 97, 99, 112
Triyugi Narayan 145
Tucher, Capt. E.F. 88
Tughlak, Feroze Shah 25
Tughlak, Mohammad 75

U

Udai Chand Raja 101
Udhav 156
Ugrasen, King of Mathura 109
Uluppi, daughter of Nag Vasuki 80
United Nations 74
Uttarkashy 13, 24, 52, 54, 77, 83, 113, 114, 116, 124
Uttar Pradesh 39
U.S. Aid 92

V

Valley of Bhagirathi 20, 137
Valley of Dhaubi Ganga, 11, 20
Valley of Mahakali 18, 22
Valley of Vyas (or Byans) 20
Varanasi 11
Vardhananath at Puri 147
Vasco da Gama 75
Vasudeva 109, 110
Vasuki, Nag 4
Vayu, god of winds, 3, 110
Vedas 3, 4, 29
Veterinary Research Institute, Indian 97
Victoria, Queen 51
Viman 4
Vindhyachal Range, the 9, 21
Vir Bhadra 81
Virat, Raja 72
Vishnu, Lord 3, 4, 5, 12, 22, 38, 45, 93, 94
Vishnu Prayag 16
Vishnu Puran 118, 42
Vishwakarma, Lord 93, 110
Viziano, Prof. Angels 134
Vyas 53
Vyas Pustaka 161

W

Wahin, king 44
Walton 28
War between devas and demons 73
War of Independence, first 26, 72, 75, 121
Webb, N.S. (of East India Company) 121
Weber 29
Wegner, Alfred 10
Wilson 113
World War, first 75

Y

Yahub Khan, Emir of Afghanistan 74, 76
Yamuna Chatti 114
Yamunotri 20, 83, 111, 112, 114, 115, 116, 117, 123, 125
Yashoda 110
Yellamma, a form of goddess Shakti 38,
Young, Capt. 76
Young Husband Expedition of Tibet 52
Yuddhishthira 80, 162

Z

Zaskar peak 17
Zaskar Range 14, 15, 16, 17, 32

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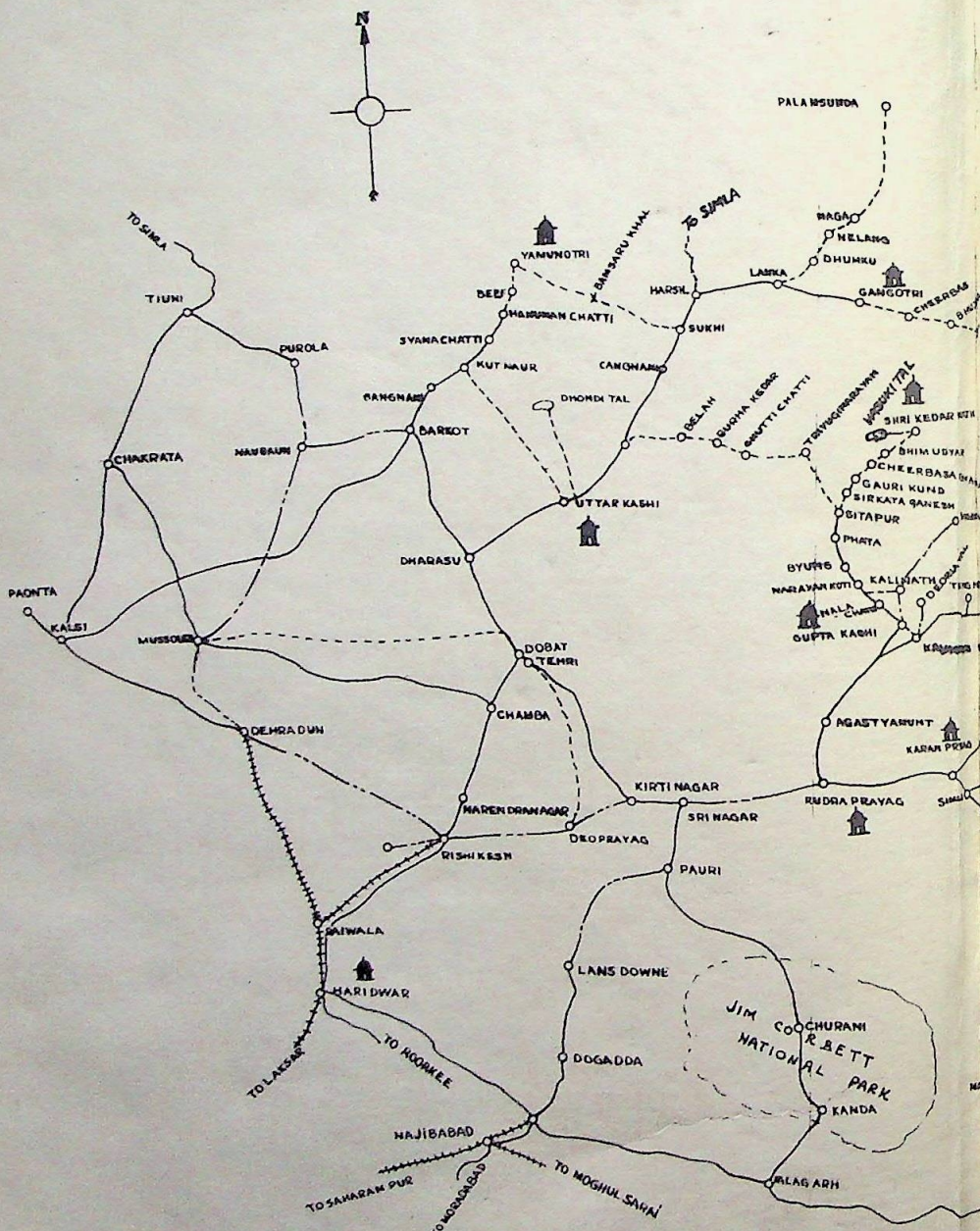

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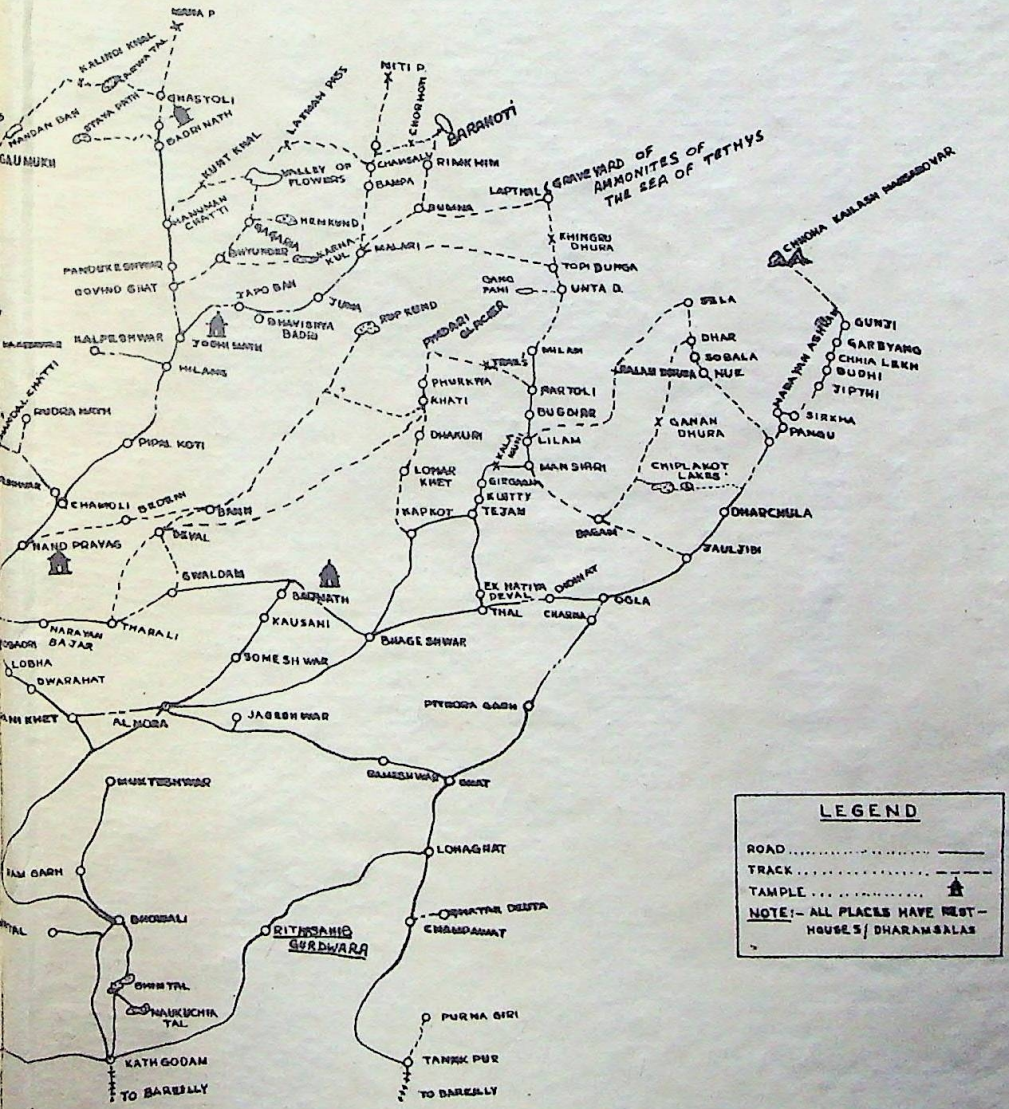

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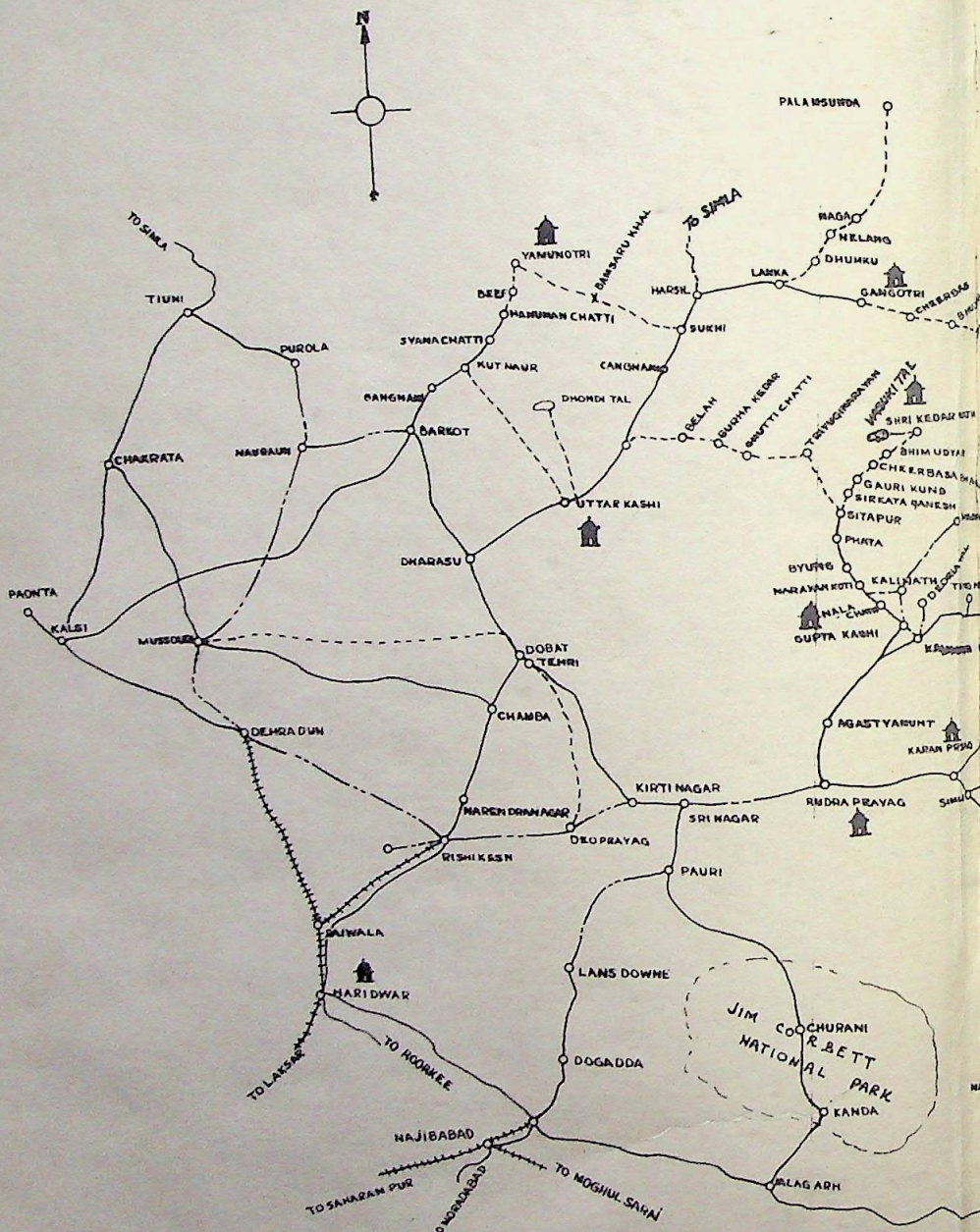

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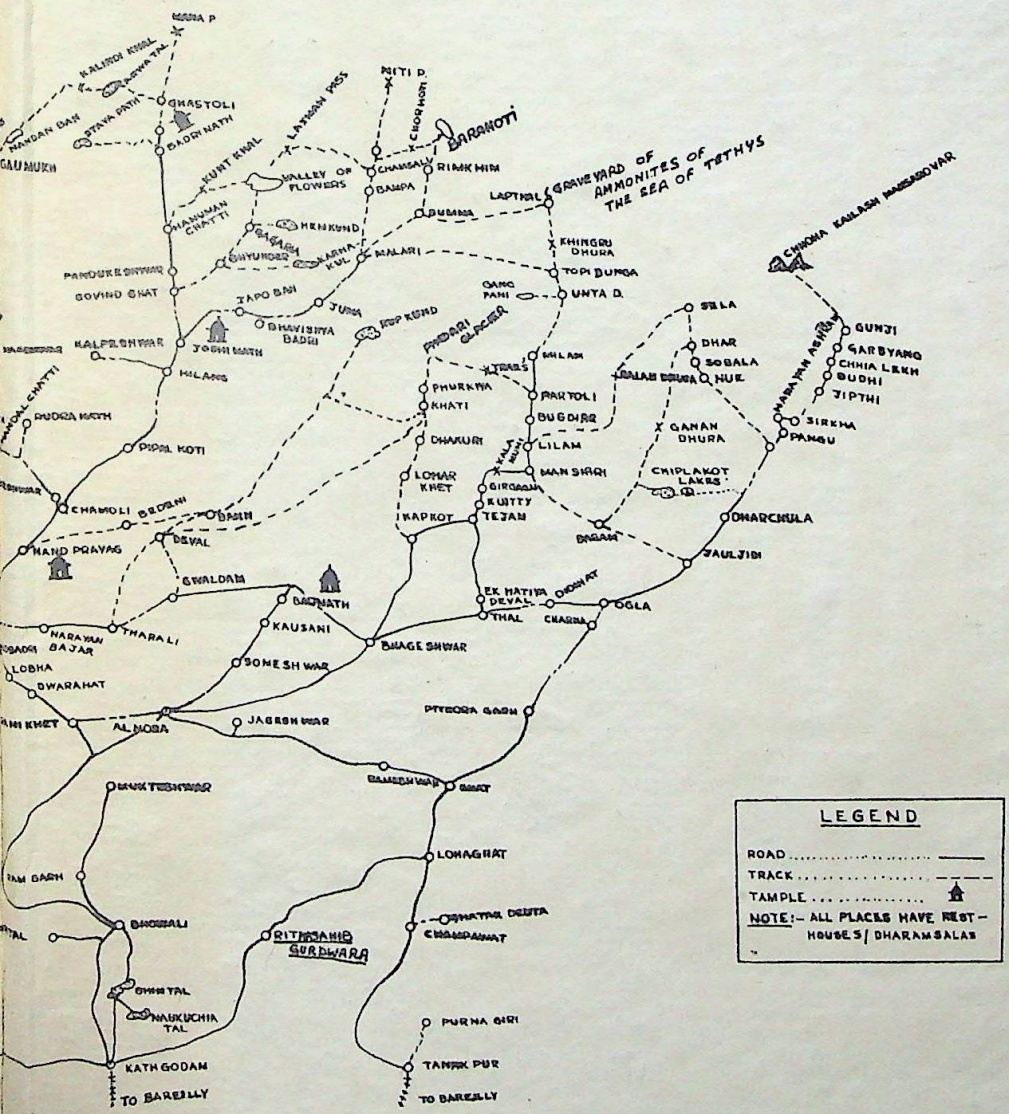

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